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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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Nobody will hire women: SC denies paid menstrual leave

'Making leave mandatory will hurt careers'

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

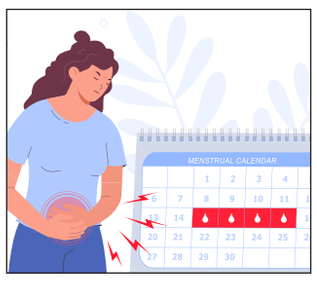
The Supreme Court on Friday rejected a PIL seeking a nationwide policy to give paid menstrual leave to women students and workers, observing no one would give them jobs. The top court said such a provision would unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes.

The court, however, asked the Centre to examine the possibility of such a policy after consulting stakeholders.

A bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi observed that while the intent behind the petition might be welfare-oriented, the practical reality of the job market could lead to "counter-productive" outcomes for women.

Justice Bagchi said that the matter was "within the domain of Parliament," and since it has not acted, "there must be a reason".

Senior advocate MR Shamsad, appearing for the petitioner, said a Karnataka government policy allows menstrual leave and some private organisations are also providing this facility. Odisha has a policy since 1992 and Kerala allowed relaxation in schools too.



These pleas are made to create fear, to call women inferior, that menstruation is something bad happening to them... but think about the employer who needs to give paid leave

-Supreme Court

"Voluntarily they are giving, then it is excellent... But the moment you introduce it as a compulsory condition in law, you do not know the damage it will do to the career of women. Nobody will give them responsibilities, even in judicial services, a normal trial will not be assigned to them," the CJI said.

"Look at the practical reality in the job market. The more unattractive the human resource, the less is the possibility of assumption in the market. Will any employer be happy with the competing claims of other genders," Justice Bagchi asked.

The bench was hearing a PIL filed by Shailendra Mani Tripathi. The bench raised the issue of locus of the petitioner and pointed out that no woman has approached the court. It was the third petition filed by Tripathi on the issue.

"These petitions are deeply rooted, designed PILs. You are not a bona fide petitioner. This is only to create a type of impression in young women that you still have some natural issues and you are not at par with male persons," the bench said. —*PTI*

India and US continue to pursue trade talks

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

India's commerce ministry has stated that New Delhi and Washington remain engaged in discussions for a mutually beneficial bilateral trade agreement. The Ministry denied reports of a hold-up in negotiations, emphasising that both sides continue to pursue an agreement. The comments are notable as the US Trade Representative (USTR) recently launched new Section 301 investigations into policies of 16 nations, including India and China. Following the US Supreme Court's decision to strike down certain tariffs, President Donald Trump announced a 10 per cent tariff on all countries for 150 days from 24 February. —*PTI*

Punjab man dies after collapsing in LPG cylinder queue

BARNALA, 13 MARCH

A 66-year-old man died after collapsing in a queue for an LPG cylinder in Punjab's Barnala amid reports of cooking gas shortage and long waiting lines. The deceased, Bhushan Kumar Mittal, reached the gas agency well before it opened to secure his place in the queue. However, he suddenly collapsed while waiting, leaving other residents shocked, police officials said. Authorities later confirmed that the man died shortly after collapsing. Mittal had reportedly been trying to obtain a cylinder for the past two or three days with no success . Police said more than 130 people had gathered outside the agency by the time of the incident occurred. —*AGENCIES*

SALAR PHOTOGRAPHER HONOURED

Salar English Digital Daily Chief Photographer Mohammed Asad receives the Karnataka Media Academy Award from Chief Minister Siddaramaiah at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Friday. With over four decades behind the lens, Asad has dedicated his career to telling powerful stories through his camera *SALAR*

Why is no one replying to questions: K'taka Speaker to MLAs

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Karnataka Legislative Assembly Speaker UT Khader on Friday admonished the government, stating that his "gentleness" should not be considered his "weakness", as he took strong exception to the fewer number of replies provided by various Departments compared to the number of questions MLAs had submitted.

The Speaker's warning came as the Opposition strongly objected and sought his "protection", when Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy laid written replies to only 55 out of 131 total questions in the Assembly.

"All MLAs want the government's reply to the questions they ask. They want proper replies, whether the questions are starred or unstarred. Once questions put by MLAs are categorised as starred or unstarred, ten days are given for the Ministers to reply through officials. But replies are given to only 55 out of 130 questions asked," Khader said. He said that explanations for the delay and when a reply can be expected are also not provided, adding "Why call a session if the government cannot reply properly?"

Home Minister G Parameshwara, responding on behalf of the government, said he will bring it to the notice of the CM. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

DKS' supporter criticises CM's Budget

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Congress MLA HA Iqbal Hussain on Friday defended his statement criticising the State Budget presented by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on 6 March, saying his loyalty lies with his constituents.

The MLA representing Ramanagara Assembly segment faced backlash from his party workers, who are calling for his expulsion from the party

A staunch supporter of Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Hussain has been demanding a leadership change.

On Friday, Congress MLA Belur Gopalakrishna labelled Hussain's comments as "anti-party activities" and demanded his expulsion.

However, Hussain claimed that he had repeatedly appealed to the CM for development works in his constituency, but there was no response.

He said a highway was not constructed scientifically, resulting in heavy flooding in the Bakshi Kere lake during previous monsoon.

Shivakumar said that Ramanagara has been taken care of in the Budget. —*PTI*

RS 425 TO RS 2,300

IndiGo to levy fuel charge for all flights

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

IndiGo will start levying fuel charges ranging from Rs 425 to Rs 2,300 on domestic and international flight tickets from 14 March amid the steep surge in jet fuel prices due to the ongoing war between the US, Israel and Iran. The move will increase the airfares.

For domestic flights and those within the Indian subcontinent, the fuel charge will be Rs 425, while it will be Rs 900 for the Middle East services, the airline said in a statement on Friday.

—WIKIPEDIA

The fuel charge will be Rs 1,800 for South East Asia and China, Africa and West Asia flights, and Rs 2,300 for Europe flights.

Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) accounts for nearly 40 per cent of an airline's operational costs.

While announcing the introduction of the fuel charge, the airline said the measure has been taken due to the significant surge in fuel prices following the war in Iran.

"While offsetting the entire impact of this fuel price surge requires a very substantial adjustment to fares, IndiGo has introduced a relatively smaller amount as a fuel charge, keeping in mind the consequential burden on customers," the airline said.

On 10 March, Air India and Air India Express announced fuel surcharges on tickets. —*PTI*

K'taka hotels may face LPG shortage for 7-10 days: Govt

The war in West Asia has forced the Strait of Hormuz, which accounts for nearly a fifth of the world's seafaring oil trade, shut, triggering shortages in India and Bengaluru —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Minister KH Muniyappa told the Legislative Council on Friday that supplying commercial cylinders to hotels or restaurants will be difficult for a week or ten days due to lack of stock.

Amid supply constraints caused by the West Asia conflict, he, however, said there are indications that the situation will improve in coming days.

The Minister also held meeting with oil companies. The commercial gas will be supplied for essential places like hospitals, hostels, residential schools.

The Minister was responding to questions raised by Congress MLCs Nagaraju Yadav and Ivan D'Souza during Zero Hour.

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-14

He asked hotels to use alternatives like electric stoves, among others, and prepare food only in the quantity required for a week or ten days.

"Two vessels have come (from the Middle East). Ten to twelve more vessels are likely to come from that region. Once others start from there, necessary arrangements can be made here," he said.

Instructions have been given to the Deputy Commissioners in the districts to take action as per the Essential Commodities Act against those indulging in illegalities concerning gas supplies, such as black marketing, Muniyappa said. On complaints about gas cylinders being sold for double the rate, he said police will take action. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pgs 2, 3, 4, 7

Distributors tell Bombay HC LPG is still being exported

MUMBAI, 13 MARCH

The Bombay High Court Nagpur Bench has issued notices to the Union Government, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, and Confidence Petroleum India Limited concerning a petition by six LPG distributors who alleged that cylinders are being exported despite the shortage.

The distributors allege that supplies of domestic cooking gas cylinders are being "severely disrupted". Justice Anil S Kilor and Justice Raj D Wakode passed the order during a hearing on a plea filed by the distributors, who are associated with Confidence Petroleum India Limited.

Kilor and Wakode termed the issue as "serious" and of grave importance.

The court directed that the storage and supply of domestic LPG cylinders must adhere strictly to government policy. The petitioners claimed that, despite the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas issuing policy directives prioritising LPG supply for domestic consumers, Confidence Petroleum had failed to increase supply. The matter has been listed for further hearing on Monday. —*PTI*

Israel-US bomb Tehran during al-Quds Day parade

DUBAI, 13 MARCH

Israel bombed Tehran near a site where thousands of Iranians gathered for an annual state-organised rally to support Palestinians. There were no immediate reports of casualties, but the strikes seemingly underscored Israel and the US' determination to force Iran to surrender by risking hundreds of civilian casualties.

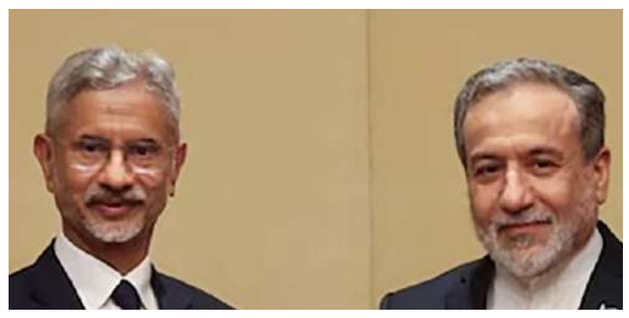
Several of Iran's top leadership took part in the rally, even though Israel had warned that it would target the area.

The public appearances came as Pentagon Chief Pete Hegseth claimed that Iranian leaders had "gone underground cowering" and that newly appointed Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei was severely wounded.

Khamenei, however, did not appear for the protests.

Iran continued to launch widespread daily missile and drone attacks on Israel and neighbouring Gulf states, and has effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's traded oil passes, even as US and Israeli warplanes pummel military and other targets across Iran. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pages 5, 6



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi had their fourth phone call in two weeks —*PTI*

BRICS must do more: Iranian FM to EAM

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke with his Iranian counterpart, Seyed Abbas Araghchi, on Thursday—their fourth such conversation since the West Asia crisis began. According to an Iranian readout, Araghchi briefed Jaishankar on the impact of recent US-Israeli attacks, affirming Iran's right to self-defence.

D-Street investors became poorer by ₹33.68 LAKH CR since beginning of West Asia conflict

The phone call comes as India intensifies efforts to secure safe passage for 28 merchant vessels through the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic route effectively blocked by Iran following the escalation of its conflict with the US and Israel.

Reports indicated that India's Ministry of External Affairs is in negotiations with Iran to ensure safe passage of the oil and gas tankers through the Strait.

During the call, Araghchi urged international and regional organisations to condemn the aggression, specifically calling on the intergovernmental BRICS forum to leverage its influence to help restore regional and global stability, a "collective need." —*PTI*

Bagalkot Dalit youth beaten to death

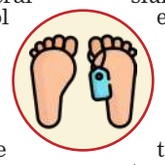
- A minor altercation escelated when a group of youth threw strones during a school event, enraging the accused, who didn't verify who hurled the rocks

BAGALKOT, 13 MARCH

A 19-year-old Dalit youth was allegedly beaten to death by a group of men following a minor altercation during a school annual function in Savalagi village of Jamkhandi taluk in Bagalkot district on Thursday night.

The deceased has been identified as Sudeep Basappa Pange. Police have registered a murder case and have arrested the three accused — Raju Bhimappa Mali, Vijay Ramachandra Savalagi, and Mallikarjun Ningappa Mali.

According to police, the incident occurred during the annual cultural program at the Government Kannada Girls' School. While villagers watched the event, several youths sat on the school roof, adjacent to the local panchayat office.



Among those on the roof was Pange. One youth allegedly threw small stones at people seated below.

Enraged by the act, the three accused allegedly confronted Pange, accusing him of throwing the stones without verifying who was responsible. They reportedly hurled casteist slurs and severely assaulted him.

Pange was seriously injured in the attack and was rushed to Jamkhandi hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries during treatment.

A case has been registered at the Savalagi police station, and further investigation is underway. —*Salar News*

— ANI

Ex-driver held for stealing jewellery in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

A man was detained for allegedly stealing diamond and gold jewellery worth Rs 14.65 lakh from a residence in the Bengaluru, police reported today. The theft was reported at Amruthahalli on 24 Feb. The complainant stated that the jewellery was kept in a cupboard at his mother-in-law's house had went missing when no one was present. Suspicion fell on a former driver who had worked there for 10 years and quit two months ago. He was held near Jakkur government school in the City & confessed to the theft along with his friend. The items, sold to a jewellery shop, was recovered. —*PTI*

— PTI

Mandya police recover 27 bikes, arrest 5 suspects

MANDYA, 13 MARCH

Police in Mandya have arrested five men involved in bike thefts across Mandya and Mysore districts. The accused were detained in two separate cases. Chandrashekhar, a resident of Kagehalladoddi, Mandya taluka, was arrested for stealing at least 15 bikes from farmers' homes, targeting parked bikes near fields. Another trio, Rihan Pasha, Syed Ayan, and a minor from Mysore, stole around 12 bikes. The police seized 27 bikes worth Rs 14 lakh and a gold chain valued at Rs 3 lakh. The operation was led by Mandya East and West police stations, with a team including PSI Seshadri Kumar and staff members Lingaraju, Umar, Ravikiran, and Shivakumar Lokesh. SP Shobha Rani praised the police for their swift action. —*ANI*

People line up with empty domestic LPG cylinders to refill them at Shivajinagar in Bengaluru on Friday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

B'luru Apartment body urges all to save LPG

The body urged residents to use cylinders judicially & suggested shifting to electric stoves

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

In view of the shortage of LPG amid the conflict in West Asia, the Bangalore Apartments' Federation (BAF) on Friday urged apartments to adopt responsible consumption practices and avoid panic booking of cylinders.

In an advisory, the Federation said that while the government and LPG distributors are trying to stabilise supplies, collective action by urban residential communities can help prevent unnecessary pressure on the distribution system.

The BAF strongly advised residents not to book multiple cylinders unnecessarily, stating that panic booking creates artificial shortages and directly affects households that depend exclusively on LPG.

Noting that most apartment complexes have a stable electricity supply, the Federation encouraged residents to temporarily shift part of their cooking to electric appliances.

It suggested induction cooktops for everyday cooking, electric pressure cookers for preparing rice, lentils and curries, and air fryers or electric grills for frying and roasting.

"Using electricity for even 30-40 per cent of cooking activities can significantly reduce LPG consumption," the advisory said.

The Federation also urged apartment management committees and residents' associations to create awareness within communities by circulating LPG conservation tips, encouraging partial use of electric appliances, advising residents against hoarding cylinders and ensuring that multiple cylinders are not stored unsafely inside flats.

People load a refilled LPG cylinder in a car amid supply crisis in the country, in Chikkamagaluru, Karnataka, on Friday—*PTI*

- The Federation encouraged residents to temporarily shift part of their cooking to electric appliances.

It said awareness messages shared through apartment WhatsApp groups could help responsible behaviour among residents.

The advisory highlighted efficient LPG usage practices to extend cylinder life, including using pressure cookers wherever possible, keeping vessels covered while cooking, using the correct burner size for utensils, cleaning burners regularly for an efficient flame and avoiding keeping the flame on.

The BAF said that adopting such practices could reduce LPG consumption by 15-20 per cent.

The Federation also called on residents and apartment associations to check if their household and association staff are facing difficulties in accessing cooking gas.

It also urged the public to rely only on official updates from LPG distributors and government agencies for supply-related information. —*PTI*

'State drafting own civil aviation policy'

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Infrastructure Development Minister **MB Patil** on Friday said that the State government is formulating a civil aviation policy of its own, covering various aspects of the sector.

He also said that a meeting of public representatives from Ballari, Vijayanagara and Koppal districts will be held soon under Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's chairmanship, regarding the airport in the region, as he stressed that both feasibility and viability should be considered while determining the location for airports.

The Minister was replying to a question about Ballari airport, raised by Gangavathi MLA G Janardhana Reddy in the Legislative Assembly.

"We build airports, but after three years they get shut down. The situation is not only in our state, but it is across the country. We don't know the future of district airports. So I met the Union Civil Aviation Minister along with the Chief Minister with a request that the UDAN scheme be extended from three years to five years, and that for the subsequent five years the Centre and the state should jointly support operations in a 50:50 ratio," Patil said.

A meeting of public representatives from the three districts will soon be convened to deliberate on the merits and challenges of the project.

Stating that airports must be planned with foresight, otherwise, the same mistakes seen in Hubballi, Belagavi and Vijayapura would be repeated, Patil pointed out that the distance between Belagavi and Hubballi airports is only about 70 km. —*PTI*

DKS DARES BJP TO CHALLENGE GUARANTEES

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Taking a dig at the BJP for demanding a roll back of State government's guarantee schemes, Deputy Chief Minister **DK Shivakumar** on Friday challenged the BJP to table a formal resolution in the Assembly to roll back guarantee schemes.

BJP MLA Suresh Gowda who urged the government to stop all the guarantee schemes. Replying to him, DKS said, "You are a senior leader and the former CM and DyCM are also sitting with you. This is not your individual opinion but your Party's opinion. We will certainly debate it, but let the BJP internally pass this resolution to roll back guarantees and table it in the House."

When a BJP member said that DyCM & CM don't look at each other, he said, "Some of my friends in BJP don't get sleep or feel happy if they don't take my name." —*Salar News*

BJP discusses candidates for bypolls in Karnataka

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Karnataka BJP President **BY Vijayendra** on Friday said the party's state core committee has discussed the selection of candidates for the upcoming by-elections to the Bagalkot and Davanagere South Assembly constituencies.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Vijayendra said the aspirations of leaders seeking the party ticket in both constituencies were discussed in detail and the names considered would be forwarded to the party's central leadership for a final decision. The meeting was attended by BJP Karnataka in-charge Radha Mohan Das Agarwal, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi, Leaders of the Opposition in the Assembly and Legislative Council, and other senior party leaders.

Vijayendra said the party had resolved to work collectively to ensure victory in the bypolls and also in the forthcoming Legislative Council elections.

He said a separate meeting was held with aspirants from the Davanagere South constituency in the presence of senior leaders, including Joshi and MP Govind Karjol, where leaders were urged to set aside past differences and work together.

On dissatisfaction over ticket allocation, Vijayendra said the issue had been discussed and leaders were asked to focus on ensuring the party's victory in by-elections. —*PTI*

State to host stranded tourists amid West Asia conflict

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Karnataka Tourism Minister HK Patil said on Friday that steps are being taken to host international tourists stranded in the State due to the ongoing conflict in West Asia, while simultaneously promoting its rich cultural heritage and strengthening tourism infrastructure.

Speaking at the Travel and Tourism Fair, Patil said that although the conflict has "no direct impact on India", it has disrupted foreign tourists' travel plans, with some "unable to return home due to visa and travel restrictions." Karnataka is ensuring their stay is "comfortable until the situation stabilises," including help with visas. "The budget provides incentives for tourism promotion, but additional support is needed to implement policies." —*PTI*

AWARDED

46 KSRTC employees pose with their awards with Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy, as part of Women's Day celebration in Shantinagar, Bengaluru, on Friday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

CM urges Varuna voters to support Yathindra

MYSURU, 13 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday requested the people of the Varuna constituency to support his son Yathindra Siddaramaiah politically.

Speaking at the inauguration of the Beereshwara Swamy Temple in Varakodu village in Varuna Siddaramaiah stated, "I will remain in politics as long as I breathe. I will continue to serve the people as long as I live."

The Chief Minister recalled the blessings, which voters of Chamundeshwari and Varuna Assembly constituencies showered on him. He said that helped him to achieve much in his political career

He said that he contested in elections for 13 times and the people voted him to power for nine times. He was grateful for

the opportunity to present the State Budget for the seventeenth time.

"I am grateful to the public for giving me an opportunity to become the Chief Minister and hold various political positions during my career," Siddaramaiah said.

"As Yathindra concentrates on the development of the constituency in my absence, I appeal to people to shower the same blessings to Yathindra and help him to develop his political career," he said. —*Salar News*

DKS SAYS NOT INVOLVED

Cong Odisha MLAs huddle near Wonderla

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Amid fears of cross-voting in the Rajya Sabha elections, Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee President Bhakta Charan Das took at least eight Congress MLAs from his state to Bengaluru and kept lodged them in a hotel reportedly near Wonderla. However, Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee President and State Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said he had nothing to do with it, amid speculations that there could be horse trading.

"There is a fear that they (BJP) may carry out Operation Lotus. They (BJP) are putting a lot of pressure on our people and offering them big inducements. So there is a lot of pressure on everyone. They want to win the Rajya Sabha seat somehow," Shivakumar claimed, after meeting the Odisha Opposition MLAs camping here. "Operation Lotus" is a term used by its rivals to claim about the BJP's alleged backdoor attempts to get support of the MLAs from the opposite camp to either form a government or to win a seat in the Rajya Sabha election. The biennial election in Odisha will be held on 16 March.

Six more MLAs along with their Congress Odisha President are likely to reach Bengaluru late on Friday —*x*

Six more MLAs, along with their Congress Odisha President will be reaching Bengaluru later in the night. Congress sources said the MLAs are expected to remain here until Monday morning before returning to Bhubaneswar to participate in the voting for the Rajya Sabha election.

Earlier speaking to reporters, DKS said though he had not brought Congress MLAs from Odisha to Bengaluru ahead of Rajya Sabha elections in that state, he will follow party's directives. "Look, whatever the party asks us to do, we must do. These things (cross voting in favour of BJP candidate) are happening in every state across the country". s—*Salar News*

Woman who kept bonded labourer for 4 decades held

UDUPI, 13 MARCH

A woman has been arrested for allegedly forcing a member of a scheduled tribe to work as a bonded labourer for nearly three decades at Kabbailu in Kanyana village in Udupi district.

The 65-year-old victim belongs to the Koraga community.

According to the complaint, the man was initially employed as a domestic worker around 30 years ago by Subbanna Shetty, a resident of Kabbailu in Kundapura taluk.

After Shetty's death, his daughter Rajani Shetty and son-in-law Karunakara Shetty allegedly continued to make the man work at their house, assigning him tasks such as tending cattle, carrying out agricultural work, cleaning cattle sheds and maintaining the household toilet.

- The man was initially employed as a domestic worker around 30 years ago by Subbanna Shetty, a resident of Kabbailu in Kundapura taluk.

The complaint states that the victim was forced to work for nearly 30 years without proper wages and basic facilities. He was allegedly made to sleep in the cattle shed and was not allowed to leave the premises. He was allegedly also subjected to harassment and exploitation during this period.

The police have registered a case. Deputy superintendent of police HD Kulkarni arrested Rajani.The accused was produced before a court, which remanded her to judicial custody. —*Salar News*

Cabinet approves 'Iva Nammava' bill to tackle honour killings

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

The State Cabinet has approved a proposed law aimed at preventing honour killings and violence linked to social customs. Named the 'Iva Nammava Iva Nammava' Bill, it seeks to curb acts of violence such as murders motivated by objections to marriages.

The bill is inspired by a verse from 12th-century poet and social reformer Basaveshwara, founder of the Lingayat sect, who urged people not to discriminate and to embrace all. Originally drafted in January as the Karnataka Freedom of Choice in Marriage and Prevention and Prohibition of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition Bill, 2026, the government reworked its provisions and renamed it. —*PTI*

—ANI

WB govt staff on 'cease-work' protest over DA

KOLKATA, 13 MARCH

A commotion broke out outside Khadya Bhavan, the headquarters of the West Bengal Food and Civil Supplies Department, on Friday as a section of state government employees tried to prevent colleagues from entering the office during a 'cease-work' agitation over pending dearness allowance. The protest was called by the 'Sangrami Joutha Mancha' (Joint Movement Forum) to press the state government for payment of DA arrears and implementation of a recent Supreme Court direction on the issue.

The apex court had also directed the state to pay 25 per cent of the DA arrears accumulated between 2008 and 2019 by 31 March, but little visible progress has been made by the government in this regard, the forum claimed. —*PTI*

SC orders status quo in Mamata defamation case

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Friday ordered status quo in a defamation case filed against BJP leader Koustav Bagchi who is accused of sharing on social media excerpts from a book con-taining allegations about the alleged private life of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

A bench comprising Justices BV Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan issued a notice to the West Bengal government on a plea filed by Bagchi against an order of the Calcutta High Court. The dispute originated from a book first published in 2015 stating that the West Bengal chief minister married someone clandestinely. It also published some other alleged details of her private life before she assumed the post of chief minister. —*PTI*

RSS to expand 'shakhas', focus on public outreach

CHANDIGARH, 13 MARCH

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Joint General Secretary C R Mukund said on Friday that emphasis is being placed on the expansion of 'shakhas' and social engagement through public outreach programmes to mark the organisation's centenary year.

In Kerala, over 55,000 Muslim and 54,000 Christian homes were covered, he said in a press conference at Samalkha in Panipat.

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat and general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale inaugurated the three-day meet of the RSS' top decision-making bod, the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS), in Samalkha.

As this year marks the centenary of the organisation, the meeting will have detailed discussions on major programmes and campaigns organised as part of the celebrations.

These are the 'grihasampark' (mass contact programme), Hindu Sammelan, youth conferences, gatherings of prominent citizens and social harmony meetings.

In his address, Mukund talked about the RSS' 'panch parivartan' initiative, which focuses on social harmony, preservation of family values, and environmental protection.

The RSS has reached out to 10 crore homes under "grihasampark," he said, adding that 3 lakh villages have been covered. In Kerala, the RSS reached out to several households including Muslims, Christians and individuals with Communist leanings.

Mukund said the sangh aims at organisational growth, focused on expansion of 'shakhas.' — *PTI*

OPPN PROTESTS AT PARL OVER LPG CRISIS

Seeks urgent relief for public amid panic buying, flays PM's absence from Parliament

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Opposition MPs on Friday held a protest in the Parliament Complex over the LPG crisis issue, and raised slogans demanding answers from Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri even as they questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's absence from the House.

Ahead of the day's proceedings, TMC MPs started a protest around 10.30 am outside the Parliament building, holding posters, chanting "LPG crisis", and raising slogans attacking the ruling BJP, questioning "where did the gas cylinders go?"

They were joined by MPs from Congress and other INDIA bloc parties. Opposition MPs also raised slogans accusing Prime Minister Modi of "vanishing" along with the gas cylinders, and accused him of "surrendering."

Opposition MPs holding LPG placards during protest outside Parliament in New Delhi on Friday *PTI*

"There's an acute crisis of LPG in the country. People are panicking. You can see that even in Bengal, because systems are crashing at the main distributors, they're resorting to manual bookings," TMC MP Mahua Moitra said.

"While this acute crisis is going on, he's electioneering in Kerala; he's become an election machine, not a prime minister. It's really a shame," Moitra added.

Some opposition MPs held large cut-outs of gas cylinders, while others held posters featuring cylinders and slogans. Chants of "Modi Ji-LPG" echoed as the INDIA bloc MPs attempted to corner the government in unison.

The opposition has been demanding a full-fledged discussion on the West Asia situation and its impact on India.

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Modi appealed to the people not to panic and assured them that public interest will be protected.

He expressed confidence in tackling the LPG crisis, where the disruption in the supply of commercial LPG has crippled the country's hotel sector. —*PTI*

Cong MP flags 'divisive' social media content

Congress MP Imran Pratapgarhi on Friday raised concern over alleged misuse of media, including social media in creating communal divide and demanded setting up an all-party committee to check "poisonous" effect of narratives that create hatred among communities. Raising the issue during Zero Hour in the Rajya Sabha, he stated that Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi had said the BJP has sprinkled kerosene of hatred across the country. -PTI

India has rightly condemned Iran's attacks on Gulf states but is completely quiet on the US-Israeli assault on Iran in the first place. It should be remembered that Iran is a part of the BRICS+ forum for which India holds the Presidency for this year...Why the hesitancy now? A compromised PM no doubt wants to avoid antagonising his American and Israeli 'friend'.

-Jairam Ramesh, Cong General Secretary in-charge Communications

Gandhi is spreading confusion and misinformation about LPG availability in the country. Gandhi behaved in a similar manner during Covid -19 and the country tackled the pandemic efficiently under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Mowdi. He only spreads confusion.

-Giriraj Singh, Union Textile minister

Slogans are great, but what is the reality? A country that aspires to be a manufacturing power cannot be exposed to external shocks... Now, in our goal to be self-reliant, we are having to invoke emergency measures to boost LPG output.

-Derek O'Brien, Trinamool Congress MP

Prime Minister, has the President of Iran assured you that they will allow our ships to pass through Hormuz? Will the countrymen soon be rid of this serious crisis?

-Arvind Kejriwal, AAP convenor

Oppn MPs submit notices in LS & RS for removal of CEC

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Opposition MPs have submitted notices in both Houses of Parliament seeking a motion for the removal of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, sources said on Friday.

According to a source, 130 Lok Sabha MPs and 63 Rajya Sabha MPs have signed the said notice.

The signatories include members from all the INDIA bloc parties, including the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which is no longer formally a part of the opposition alliance, the source said.

Some Independent MPs have also signed the notice while several others have evinced interest in joining the initiative, the source added. TMC Rajya Sabha leader Derek O'Brien said not taking up the notice would mean a tacit understanding between executive and CEC.

- Signatories include members from INDIA bloc parties, including the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which is no longer formally a part of the opposition alliance, the source said

This is the first time a notice has been moved seeking the removal of the CEC.

According to sources, the notice lists seven charges against Kumar, including alleged "partisan and discriminatory conduct in office", "deliberate obstruction of investigation of electoral fraud" and "mass disenfranchisement".

The opposition parties have accused the CEC of aiding the ruling BJP on several occasions, especially with the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, which they alleged aims to help the saffron party at the Centre.

The process for removing the CEC is similar to that for the removal of a Supreme Court or a high court judge. —*PTI*

Bill for 'transgender' definition tabled in LS

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

A bill seeking to establish a legally precise definition of the term "transgender" and institute proportionate penalties corresponding to the severity of harm inflicted upon such individuals was introduced in the Lok Sabha on Friday.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill was introduced by Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Virendra Kumar.

It notes that it is imperative to give a precise definition for proper and definitive identification and protection of transgender persons, to whom the benefits of the present law must reach.

The text further clarifies that the definition of a transgender person excludes individuals whose primary characteristic is a different sexual orientation or a self-perceived sexual identity.

The Bill claims that the protections and benefits provided under the 2019 law are wide-ranging, and therefore, care must be taken that "such identification cannot be extended based on any acquirable characteristics, personal choice, or claimed self-perceived identity of an individual."

It said present law prohibits discrimination and abuse against transgenders but its penal provision addresses only general wrongs and criminal offences with maximum of two years jail. —*PTI*

KERALA POLLS

Police guard rebel Sudhakaran's house amid CPI(M) protest

ALAPPUZHA, 13 MARCH

Security has been tightened at the residence of rebel CPI(M) leader G Sudhakaran in Alappuzha after protests by party workers over his decision to contest the upcoming Assembly elections as an independent candidate from the Ambalapuzha constituency.

Police officials said on Friday that patrol teams and a police vehicle from the Punnapra police station have been deployed near Sudhakaran's house to maintain law and order amid rising tensions.

The protests began soon after the veteran leader announced on Thursday that he would enter the fray as an independent candidate.

Angry CPI(M) workers put up posters near his home calling him a "traitor" and raised slogans against him.

Sudhakaran had been a prominent face of the CPI(M) in the coastal district for several decades and previously served as a state minister. Known for his clean image and administrative experience, he recently said he would not renew his party membership.

- Police said on Friday that patrol teams and a police vehicle from the Punnapra police station have been deployed near Sudhakaran's house to maintain order amid tensions over his move to contest as an independent candidate

The former minister alleged that a section of CPI(M) cadres had been targeting him with personal attacks on social media platforms, which contributed to his decision to distance himself from the party. —*PTI*

WB govt to form development boards for 5 communities

KOLKATA, 13 MARCH

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday announced that her government would constitute new cultural and development boards for five communities.

Banerjee, who made the announcement ahead of the Assembly polls, said the boards will safeguard the customary rights and ensure socio-economic growth of the Munda (ST), Kora (ST), Dom (SC), Kumbhakar (OBC) and Sadgope (OBC) communities.

These boards will protect their unique languages and traditions while ensuring better education, healthcare, and jobs, she said.

Banerjee said that since 2013, her government has established many such boards for our weaker communities, ensuring their all-around development.

Elections to the 294-member assembly in West Bengal are expected to be held in April.

Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition in West Bengal assembly, Suvendu Adhikari said he raised the issue of the "insult" of President Droupadi Murmu by the state government, during his first meeting with new Governor RN Ravi.

He also hailed the Rashtrapati Bhavan's refusal to give an appointment to TMC MPs. —*PTI*

BJP worked for peace, Cong for selfish gains: PM in Assam

GUWAHATI, 13 MARCH

In a scathing attack against the Congress party ahead of the ensuing assembly elections in Assam, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday asserted that the BJP worked for "permanent peace" in the region, while the Congress, during its tenure, signed various accords for "selfish political interests".

Addressing a public meeting in Assam's Kokrajhar district virtually from Guwahati after rain disrupted his travel schedule, Modi exhorted the people: "Punish the Congress in the upcoming elections and send a clear message that there is no place for infiltrators in this country."

Modi said that sounds of bombs and gunfire are a thing of the past in the Northeast, and the state was writing a new chapter of peace and development under the "double-engine" government.

The Prime Minister alleged that the Congress endangered national security by handing over the land of indigenous people to infiltrators.

"Punish the Congress in the upcoming elections and send a clear message that there is no place for infiltrators in this country," he asked the people.

In an apparent reference to Rahul Gandhi's 'Mohabbat ki Dukaan' (shop of love) slogan, the Prime Minister claimed: "The Congress is a 'jhute vaido ke dukkan' (a shop of false promises), and with one lie it gives four more 'super lies' as a gift, as they do not have the intention of fulfilling any promise."

The elections for the 126-member Assam Assembly are likely to be held in April.

Modi alleged that the Congress was always in league with the infiltrators and never legally granted land rights to the state's indigenous population. —*PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi lays the foundation stone and unveils development projects in Assam. Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, Governor Lakshman Acharya and CM Himanta Biswa Sarma are also seen —*PTI*

RUN UP TO TN POLLS

Sasikala names party, to tie up for polls

CHENNAI, 13 MARCH

Weeks after announcing the launch of her political party, expelled AIADMK leader V K Sasikala on Friday announced the name of the organisation, All India Puratchi Thalaivar Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam.

On February 24, coinciding with the 74th birth anniversary of late AIADMK supremo J Jayalalithaa, her close aide Sasikala unveiled the party flag at Kamuthi in Ramanathapuram district.

The new party's symbol will be 'coconut grove', which symbolises unity that she has always strived for, Sasikala told reporters.

To a question, she said the party would face the upcoming Assembly election in alliance.

Jayalalitha's close aide VK Sasikala will enter Tamil Nadu's changing political landscape as she prepares to contest the upcoming polls —*PTI*

Elaborating about the plan for her party, Sasikala said, "Did you see our party symbol? It is the coconut grove. We always think of it as a collective grove."

"We will form an alliance with like-minded parties. Some people prefer to contest alone, saying they do not need an alliance. But we are not like that. I want to state clearly that we must do good for the people of Tamil Nadu," she said.

To another query, she recalled that there is a proverb in Tamil - A single tree does not make a grove. "True to that proverb, we have not come as a single tree. We have come as a grove. That grove consists of our party workers and the people," she said.

"We will work together with (alliance) parties that share the same views and ideologies we follow," she said, adding that the now on the party's journey will be a 'journey of victory'. —*PTI*

Release Rs 3,112 cr Jal Jeevan dues: Stalin to PM

CHENNAI, 13 MARCH

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Friday sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention to release Rs 3,112 crore in pending dues to ensure completion of the ongoing Jal Jeevan Mission schemes in the state.

In a letter to Modi, Stalin pointed out that the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti, recently indicated that central assistance cannot be extended to the Hogenekkal Phase-III Combined Water Supply Scheme. This comes despite the project worth Rs 8,428 crore receiving approval in June 2023.

- Stalin said 1.12 crore homes now have household tap connections, which is 90 per cent of the total 1.25 crore rural households under the mission.

Stalin said 1.12 crore homes now have functional household tap connections, which is 90 per cent of the total 1.25 crore rural households under the mission. The Centre has released Rs 5,914 crore as its share under the Jal Jeevan Mission, leaving a balance of Rs 3,112 crore.

The state government released an advance of Rs 2,550 crore from the state resources to meet the expenditure of ongoing works under the Jal Jeevan Mission. —*PTI*

— PTI

Curfew partly off in Meghalaya's violence-hit areas

SHILLONG, 13 MARCH

Curfew was partially relaxed in two districts of Meghalaya on Friday to allow residents to buy essential items, officials said. West Garo Hills saw a four-hour relax from 9am to 1pm, while East Garo Hills permitted a longer relaxation from 8am to 5pm, said Deputy Commissioner RP Marak. Clashes earlier this week between tribal and non-tribal groups during Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) election nominations resulted in two deaths in police firing, with property damage reported. The government postponed the 10 April elections. Security remains tight, with authorities urging residents to stay peaceful and law enforcement ready to act against violations. —PTI

Rajasthan trainee cops sent back over AI misuse

BHOPAL, 13 MARCH

Thirty-six Rajasthan police recruits training in Madhya Pradesh's Gwalior were sent home after creating AI-manipulated images that showed stale food at the training centre and circulating them online, officials said on Friday. MP Additional Director General of Police Raja Babu Singh confirmed the recruits, mainly from Rajasthan's telecom wing, were involved in a mischievous campaign against the Police Training Centre at Tighra. The recruits, part of a nine-month course, caused trouble for the facility. They were returned to Rajasthan on Thursday. The incident followed complaints that the recruits demanded Rajasthani dishes like "gatte ki sabzi" and "ker-sangri" instead of food served at the centre. —PTI

Public kills stray dog which killed Kerala granny

THRISSUR, 13 MARCH

A stray dog that allegedly attacked and caused the death of 84-year-old bedridden woman Karthiyani was killed by local residents in Vellarakad, Thrissur. The dog also attacked her son Devadasan and three others, police said. The animal was found around 2am on Friday, and veterinarians will examine it for rabies. The police registered a case of unnatural death. Karthiyani's body will be handed over after a post-mortem. Her son Devadasan, also injured, was discharged. The incident was discovered when Karthiyani's son Mani found her severely injured and Devadasan in a pool of blood, and they were hospitalised. Residents claim stray dogs survive on animal skins discarded by local cottage industries and small businesses. —PTI

Andhra milk contamination deaths rise to 14

RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM, 13 MARCH

The death toll from suspected milk adulteration in East Godavari district has risen to 14, with six others hospitalised, police said on Friday. Lab tests revealed victims suffered multi-organ failure caused by acute renal failure after consuming milk contaminated with ethylene glycol, police added. The incident began on 16 February in Lalacheruvu village, with victims experiencing urinary issues and kidney problems. The case was registered on 22 February after 76-year-old Tadi Krishnaveni died during treatment. Police collected samples from the vendor, Addala Ganeswararao, who sourced milk from 43 farmers. The investigation involved analysing milk, blood, and storage containers, revealing continued supply despite bitter taste complaints. Ganeswararao is in custody. —PTI

AI to list cases for SC, allocate bench

Reforms initiated after an internal probe exposed systemic failures in the SC registry

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

In what could be a significant change in the functioning of the Supreme Court's administrative establishment, software powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI) will take over case listing and bench allocation in the court. This would effectively remove human intervention in the process.

The decision was taken by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant, highly placed sources said.

Currently, cases are allocated to different benches by the CJI who is the master of roster, a power which brings the office of the CJI under immense scrutiny.

The reforms stem from an internal probe which exposed two systemic failures within the registry. One was registry officials who had dug into their positions over extended periods, and two, outdated technological infrastructure that had long provided cover for administrative lapses including irregular and improper case allocation.

The Supreme Court registry has also witnessed an unprecedented wave of inter-departmental transfers of registry officials in a bid to dismantle years of entrenched incumbency and systemic inefficiency. A second round of transfers is expected before the end of the month.

Now cases are allocated by the CJI who is the master of roster, a power which brings the CJI's office under immense scrutiny — PTI

The trigger was a glaring lapse uncovered during proceedings before a bench of CJI Surya Kant, Justice Joymalya Bagchi and Justice Vipul Pancholi, which was hearing a petition filed by Irfan Solanki challenging the Uttar Pradesh Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act, 1986, on grounds of repugnancy vis—a-vis Section 111 of BNS, 2023.

The State of Uttar Pradesh brought to the court's notice that a near-identical challenge in Md. Anas Chaudhary vs State of Uttar Pradesh had already been dismissed by a three-judge bench comprising former Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, Justice PS Narasimha and Justice Dipankar Datta on 12 December 2022, with a direction to the petitioner to pursue remedies before the competent forum.

Despite the dismissal, a similar petition had found its way onto the cause list before a fresh bench.

CJI Kant took strong exception to the lapse. Although Senior Advocate Shoeb Alam sought to withdraw the plea, CJI Kant directed that it will remain pending before the Court and will be taken to a logical conclusion. The CJI had then announced that a deeper administrative probe would follow. — *Agencies*

SC takes note of illegal sand mining in Chambal Sanctuary

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

The Supreme Court took suo motu cognisance of illegal sand mining in the National Chambal Sanctuary and the threat it poses to endangered aquatic wildlife.

Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta said on Friday that the court has taken cognisance of newspaper reports highlighting rampant illegal mining in areas where the endangered gharial (long-snouted crocodile) species preservation programme is going on.

Due to the illegal mining, the endangered gharials have to relocate, the court said.

The Supreme Court bench said that even areas where the Madhya Pradesh chief minister had released gharials have come under illegal mining.

"Place the matter before the Chief Justice of India for directions," the court ordered the registry.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav released 10 gharials into the Chambal River at the sanctuary in Morena in February 2025.

The National Chambal Sanctuary, also called the National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary, is a 5,400 sq km tri-state protected area—PTI

The National Chambal Sanctuary, also called the National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary, is a 5,400 sq km tri-state protected area.

Besides the gharial, it is home to the red-crowned roof turtle and the endangered Ganges river dolphin.

Located on the Chambal river near the tripoint of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, the sanctuary was first declared a protected area in Madhya Pradesh in 1978 and now constitutes a long narrow eco-reserve co-administered by the three states. — *PTI*

Tirumala laddu: SC bins plea against 'misinfo'

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

The Supreme Court refused to entertain a plea seeking a direction for taking action against individuals or organisations allegedly spreading misinformation through posters or public statements about the Tirumala laddu controversy.

The court, on 4 October 2024, had set up a five-member independent SIT to probe allegations that animal fat is being used to prepare Tirupati laddus, while making it clear that the court cannot be used as a "political battleground."

Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi said a criminal case has been registered in the matter, and the probe is going on.

The bench said the petitioner or any other interested person can submit the materials, if any, to the probe agency for taking the investigation to a logical conclusion. — *PTI*

- On 4 October 2024, the SC had set up a five-member SIT to probe allegations that animal fat is being used to prepare Tirupati laddus

'No NAA testing in blood banks'

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Why should we pretend that we know medical science, the Supreme Court on Friday said while refusing to entertain a plea seeking mandatory Nucleic Acid Amplification Testing (NAAT) in all blood banks to ensure supply of infection-free blood. The court observed it was for the domain experts to decide what testing should be done in blood banks.

Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi asked the petitioner 'Sarvesham Mangalam Foundation' to submit a comprehensive representation to the secretary of the health departments of States and Union Territories on the issue.

The bench said the secretary may, with the aid and advice of domain experts, take appropriate decision on the issue.

It said the nature of relief sought in the petition entails financial implications and every state has its own financial limitations.

On 25 February, the SC sought more details like costs and availability of the facility to conduct NAAT in government hospitals across India to detect Transfusion Transmissible Infections like HIV and hepatitis.

The bench had asked lawyer A Velan, appearing for the PIL petitioner, to provide details like the cost of conducting NAAT tests.

The PIL sought an order to the Centre and states to declare that the "Right to Safe Blood" is an intrinsic facet of the Right to Life under Article 21. It also sought directions to "implement mandatory NAAT in all blood banks across India for the detection of Transfusion Transmissible Infections (TTIs) like HIV, HCV, HBV, malaria, and syphilis, in blood collected from donors." — *PTI*

SC stays HC order on sanction for CBI to try Mahua Moitra

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

The Supreme Court stayed a part of the December 2025 order of the Delhi High Court permitting the Lokpal to consider granting sanction to the CBI to file a charge sheet against Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra in the alleged cash-for-query scam.

CJI Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi issued notices to Moitra, the CBI and BJP MP and complainant Nishikant Dubey on Friday regarding the Lokpal's plea against the HC order.

On 19 December 2025, the HC had set aside an order of the Lokpal granting sanction to the CBI to file a charge sheet against Moitra in the alleged cash-for-query scam. The CJI-led bench stayed para 89 of the high court judgement while issuing notices on a batch of pleas regarding procedures enumerated under Section 20 of the Lokpal Act. — *PTI*

Synthetic drug unit busted in AP, Rs 47 cr Alprazolam seized

AMARAVATI, 13 MARCH

The DRI busted an illicit synthetic drugs manufacturing facility at Kondapalli in NTR District and seized 237 kg of Alprazolam worth Rs 47 crore, DRI release said on Friday.

As part of 'Operation White Hammer,' the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) raided the clandestine facility producing the psychotropic substance in the Kondapalli Industrial Development Area in NTR District.

The DRI also seized 800 kg raw materials, 2,860 litres of chemicals and industrial scale equipment like reactors, driers and a centrifuge.

The DRI said the setup indicates an organised and large-scale clandestine manufacturing facility.

Preliminary investigation revealed the operation was spearheaded by a chemist with over 20 years of experience in the chemical and pharmaceutical sector. He worked with an associate, who arranged raw materials and distribution in Hyderabad, said the release.

They rented a factory premises for manufacturing Alprazolam, said DRI, adding that both the masterminds have been arrested.

The DRI undertook the raids on 11 and 12 March and seized over 3.5 tons of chemicals.

The illicit synthetic drugs manufacturing facility was operating as a chemical manufacturing unit. — *PTI*

The DRI seized 237 kg of Alprazolam worth Rs 47 crore from the illicit synthetic drug factory in Kondapalli in Andhra's NTR district —PIB

'Namami Gange' project failed in Uttarakhand: CAG

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

A report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has flagged the role of implementing agencies in Uttarakhand for the failure of the Centre's 'Namami Gange' programme to deliver the desired results in the state.

It said that under the flagship programme, launched over a decade ago to clean the Ganga River, the Centre had provided Rs 1,000 crore between 2018 and 2023.

However, the report, presented during the state's budget session, notes several irregularities in this project, including defective designs of sewage treatment plants (STPs), poor maintenance of infrastructure, failure to tap waste drains discharging into the Ganga, and the dumping of waste near rivers and smaller streams. — *PTI*

UP ethanol plant killings: Two cops suspended

BUDAUN, 13 MARCH

After two senior HPCL officials associated with an ethanol plant were shot dead, two police officers have been suspended for negligence, after a report by the circle officer, officials said on Friday.

Meanwhile, relatives of one of the deceased, Harshit Mishra, alleged that pleas regarding the threat to his life were not heeded by the police.

Mishra, 34, who was the assistant general manager (AGM) at the Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) plant in Sejni village was killed on Thursday, along with Sudhir Kumar Gupta, 58, a general manager.

Inspector Ajay Kumar and Sub-Inspector Dharmendra Kumar were suspended on Thursday for negligence, officials said.

Rani Devi, Mishra's mother, alleged that her son had informed the district magistrate (DM), SP and the local MLA about then threats to his life. She alleged that the accused, Ajay Pratap Singh alias Ramu, used to issue open threats. "My son told everyone that his life was in danger. He approached the SP, the DM, and even the MLA, but no one listened to us. There were many people present at the meeting; why, then, was only my child killed?" she said.

The two officials of the ethanol plant in Budaun were shot dead on Thursday after a blacklisted vendor allegedly opened fire inside the HPCL plant. Police have arrested the shooter. They said Gupta, the deceased GM, had recently terminated some employees and blacklisted vendors whose work was not satisfactory. Singh was among those dismissed. — *PTI*

LPG SHORTAGE

40 pc Kerala hotels shut, people block Odisha roads

T'PURAM/HYDERABAD/ MADURAI/ BHUBANESHWAR/KOTA, 13 MARCH

The shortage of LPG continues to trouble the public all over India with many places reporting panic buying and hotels closing down.

In Kerala, G Jayapal, the President of the Kerala Hotel and Restaurant Association (KHRA), told PTI that by Friday around 40 per cent of restaurants in the state have shut down. Crematoriums too have been hit in Kerala.

The LPG shortage has affected caterers very badly in Kerala, as the crisis came just as the marriage season is set to begin.

Hostels with mess facilities have also been affected by the LPG shortage. Suja, who runs a hostel in Kochi said that she has switched to firewood.

A 19-kg commercial LPG cylinder was allegedly stolen from a hotel in the busy Chala market in Thiruvananthpuram in the early hours of Friday, police said. The theft was reported at VS Hotel in at 2 am on Friday.

In Telangana, the LPG Distributors Association President, Kalluri Jagan Mohan Reddy, said the sudden spike in orders has paralysed the distribution network.

"There is no problem with domestic cylinders. There is a regular supply also. But there is panic booking among the consumers, so pendency is increasing," Reddy told PTI.

In Odisha, the LPG shortage triggered protests and road blockades on Friday, with consumers complaining about delays in receiving refilled cooking gas cylinders. Long queues were seen outside LPG distribution centres across the state as people waited for refills, often days after booking.

In Odisha's Jajpur town, residents blocked a road by placing empty LPG cylinders after a local distributor shut office, displaying a "No Stock Today" notice. In Keonjhar district, residents blocked the Keonjhar–Sanaghagara road, disrupting traffic for some time. Meanwhile, Odisha civil supplies officials conducted raids in Jharsuguda district and seized 92 cylinders, including 29 filled ones, an officer said.

In Rajasthan's Kota, a shortage of domestic and commercial LPG cylinders, has affected the coaching hub of Kota, where around 4,000 hostels and over 500 messes serve about one lakh students preparing for competitive exams.

Kota Collector Piyush Samaria issued directions to ensure regular LPG supply to domestic consumers, hospitals and coaching institutions (with hostels), while imposing strict restrictions on the supply of commercial LPG cylinders. — *PTI*

- In Rajasthan's Kota, a shortage of domestic and commercial LPG cylinders, has affected the coaching hub of Kota, where around 4,000 hostels serve about 1 lakh students

PROTEST IN KASHMIR

Protests broke out on Friday in some Shia-dominated areas of Kashmir, including Magam and Budgam, against the US-Israel strikes on Iran, prompting restrictions in Srinagar and other parts of the valley, as a precautionary measure. The historic Jamia Masjid in Nowhatta locality was closed, marking the seventh consecutive year that Eid prayers were not allowed inside. Tens of thousands of people were gathered in front of the gates —*PTI*

Oil tanker attack deliberate, says Safesea Vishnu Chief

The attack on US-owned crude oil tanker Safesea Vishnu that killed an Indian crew member appears to have been "deliberate and calculated", the maritime company's Chief has said.

Chairman of maritime company Safesea Group SV Anchan emphasised that the strike must serve as a wake-up call for governments that commercial shipping lanes cannot become battle zones and the lives of seafarers must never be treated as collateral damage.

On 11 March, the Marshall Islands-flagged Safesea Vishnu was attacked off Khor Al Zubair port near Basra, Iraq by an Iranian "suicide" boat.

Tragically, in the attack, an Indian crew member, who was one of the top seafarers on the vessel, was killed.

Giving the first detailed account of the harrowing incident, Anchan recounted how the crew members on his ship came under attack on the night of 11 March at 11.45pm local time and "found themselves fighting for their lives".

Anchan said in the statement that the vessel was anchored at Khor Al Zubair and was engaged in routine ship-to-ship loading operations. It had already completed part of its cargo operations alongside the berth and had shifted to anchorage to complete the loading of approximately 53,000 metric tons of naphtha.

He said the timing chosen for the strike placed the crew in an extremely vulnerable position.

"At anchorage, with the vessel in a laden condition, evacuation options were severely limited. When the explosion and resulting fire engulfed the port side of the vessel, the crew had only moments to react," he said.

He further added that lowering the lifeboats on the port side became impossible due to the fire and damage. On the starboard side, a receiving vessel was double-banked for cargo transfer operations, further restricting escape routes.

On 11 March, Safesea Vishnu was attacked off Khor Al Zubair port near Basra, Iraq by an Iranian 'suicide' boat —*PTI*

As the fire spread rapidly across the ship, the situation became desperate, the statement noted, adding that the mooring ropes eventually gave way, causing the receiving vessel to drift away — an event that ultimately created a narrow window for survival.

"In those terrifying moments, all 28 crew members were forced to jump into the water to escape the burning vessel. Their courage and instinct for survival saved lives," Anchan said.

He expressed gratitude to the Iraqi Coast Guard and local authorities, saying their rapid action prevented a far greater tragedy, and due to their swift response, almost all the crew were rescued.

However, despite these heroic rescue efforts, the maritime community suffered a heartbreaking loss when one brave seafarer lost his life.

"Despite being recovered from the water and receiving immediate medical attention, including CPR from the responding teams, he could not be revived," the statement said.

"How long will the world allow merchant seafarers to be caught in the crossfire of regional conflicts?"

"The global shipping industry carries more than 90 per cent of world trade. Every nation depends on it. Every economy relies on the uninterrupted movement of energy, food, and essential goods across the seas. Yet the people who make this system work — the seafarers themselves — are increasingly being placed at risk," it said.

The seafarers operate far from home, often in volatile regions, ensuring that global supply chains continue to function, doing their work quietly, professionally, and without recognition.

Even in the face of this horrifying incident, the bravery of the crew of MT Safesea Vishnu sends a powerful message that the "spirit of seafarers cannot be broken."

The remaining 27 crew members onboard MT Safesea Vishnu are currently safe and are receiving assistance from the Embassy of India in Iraq, which acted swiftly to support the crew and coordinate their safe repatriation, Anchan said.

The vessel is now reported to be listing to port, and a specialised salvage team has been activated to stabilise the ship and ensure the safety of the surrounding marine environment. While the cargo onboard does not presently indicate an immediate environmental threat, precautionary measures are being taken to protect the waters of the Gulf.

In a post on X, the Embassy of India in Baghdad said it is in regular contact with Iraqi authorities, rescued Indian sailors and is offering all possible assistance.

According to information on the website Vessel Finder, the 228.6 meters long and 32.57 meters wide Safesea Vishnu is a crude oil tanker built in 2007, currently sailing under the flag of the Marshall Islands. It has a gross tonnage of 42,010 and deadweight tonnage of 73,976.

Describing the merchant seafarers as "silent soldiers" of global commerce, Anchan said, "these men and women are not soldiers. They are not part of any military campaign. They are professionals who keep global trade moving — transporting the energy, food, and goods that sustain economies and societies around the world." —*PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Here's how crude is broken into 6,000 everyday items

- Unlike the hundreds of chemicals in the humble tomato, the tens of thousands of individual chemicals in a barrel of oil mean that between five and ten of these fractionation columns must be placed in sequence, each producing a more precise product than the last.

As the US–Israel war on Iran escalates, so too does the global oil crisis.

The effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly 20 per cent of the world's oil and natural gas flows, and the targeting of oil production facilities in the Middle East have lifted the oil price by 34 per cent.

The price of Brent crude – the global benchmark – now sits at more than $100 a barrel.

This means the cost of the many products derived from crude oil, such as petrol or gasoline, has also surged.

But how does crude oil become the fuel you pump into your car?

LIKE SIMMERING A PASTA SAUCE

Most consumers are transfixed when the oil price exceeds $100 per barrel. But the economic reality is both more complex and longer-term.

That's because the content of the barrel itself is not directly usable.

Rather, it must be broken (or "fractionated") into the chemicals used to produce more than 6,000 everyday products.

These household items include the textiles and clothing dyes on our literal backs, electronics in our hands, flooring beneath our feet, and pharmaceuticals regulating our bodies.

Some of these products can be replaced with non-petroleum alternatives. But doing so can increase consumer prices by an order of magnitude.

The process of transforming a barrel of oil into these products is managed in the discipline of chemical engineering, through which high-temperature vessels (called "columns") allow fluids to be split (or "fractionated") into less- and more-dense products.

The experience is similar to simmering a pasta sauce, where the chef uses a precise temperature to boil off water (the less dense product) and concentrate the chemistry that makes tomatoes enjoyable.

SPLITTING IN SEQUENCES

Unlike the hundreds of chemicals in the humble tomato, the tens of thousands of individual chemicals in a barrel of oil mean that between five and ten of these fractionation columns must be placed in sequence, each producing a more precise product than the last.

Most consumers would be familiar with the products of the first few columns, in which natural gas is the least dense (or "lightest") product that typically powers the above-mentioned chef's stove.

The next-densest product is gasoline, which accounts for around half of the volume of a traditional barrel of oil.

With additional heat and cost, the heavier products can be split into kerosene ("jet fuel") and, with yet more heat, the diesel fuel that constitutes around one quarter of an average barrel.

Separating the remaining products requires extremely high temperatures. This results in chemicals used to manufacture modern roads, rubbers, synthetic fabrics, plastics and cosmetics, among many others.

NOT ALL OIL IS THE SAME

The final complication emerges from the geological processes that themselves "manufacture" crude oil.

Over millions of years, high pressures and temperatures degrade and liquefy (or "cook") volumes of dead plants and animals, often deep under the ground.

As the plants, animals and geology of each biome are unique, so too is the crude oil formed underground. This reality means that one barrel of oil cannot simply be traded for another and used in the refinery columns described above. The collection of columns requires months to reach stable operation, and they are heavily dependent on the type and properties of the oil at the inlet.

Crucially, the time lag between producing one barrel of oil and finding its chemistry in the hands of an eager shopper is typically between one and three months, depending on the complexity of the consumer product.

Gasoline prices may feel an impact within a few weeks, while consumer plastics (such as food storage containers) may require multiple quarters to demonstrate an impact.

Alongside countries heavily dependent on crude oil imports, those with limited crude oil reserves or refining capacity are further exposed, as they must also import the crude oil "products" described above.

Nearly one-third of the oil exported through the Strait of Hormuz is destined for China, while China and other Asian buyers together account for three-quarters of these export destinations.

The conflict itself involves Western and West Asia forces. But it is ironically those Pacific nations that carry the greatest near- and mid-term inflationary risk as this crucial shipping lane is put in jeopardy. —*The Conversation*

The price of Brent crude, which is the global benchmark, now sits at more than $100 a barrel —*PTI*

Deadly strike or Call of Duty? How US is trying to memeify Iran war

Millions of people recently watched a video posted by the White House showing US strikes against Iranian targets.

The clip didn't just resemble Call of Duty: it mixed real strike footage with footage from the game itself, complete with "killstreak" animations designed to reward performance and simulate achievement.

Governments are increasingly communicating war using the visual language of video games and internet memes.

In doing so, they don't just trivialise violence – they make it harder to grieve the victims of the violence, by anaesthetising our responses to the suffering.

It's a tactic that shapes how we interpret violence, and which quietly determines whose deaths register as deaths at all.

WAR AS MEMES AND VIRAL CONTENT

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth has publicly celebrated the strikes and wider military campaign, dubbed Operation Epic Fury – collapsing the distance between military spokesperson and combat enthusiast.

The White House video is not an isolated case. Across social media, videos with military footage are circulating as gaming clips or memes: drone strikes with cross-hair graphics, explosions set to pulse-pounding music. One Department of Homeland Security video of ICE raids was set to the Pokémon theme song.

But the same features that make the content go viral also flatten the reality behind the footage.

Important context often disappears. Who was targeted? Were civilians harmed? Was the strike legal? These questions are rarely addressed in a 20-second clip.

War's visual language is never innocent. It carries instructions about how to feel. A huge problem arises when governments deliberately adopt the visual language of gaming to present real military operations. What this language doesn't carry is consequence.

Meme culture compounds this. Irony and humour are structurally anti-grief. They create distance as their primary function. When violence circulates as a joke or a highlight reel, the emotional reality of it becomes difficult to access.

War is still seen, but it is no longer felt in the same way.

Governments are increasingly communicating war using the visual language of video games and internet memes —*SCREENGRAB*

FROM CNN TO CALL OF DUTY

The so-called "CNN effect", associated with television coverage of conflicts from Vietnam to Somalia, was premised on proximity. Footage of suffering brought distant wars into living rooms and generated moral pressure on governments.

While imperfect and selective, the underlying logic was that "seeing" produced "feeling", and feeling produced accountability. The camera lingered. The correspondent named the dead. Viewers were given time to register what they were witnessing.

That model was already fracturing before social media. The 1991 Gulf War introduced a new aesthetic: precision strikes filmed from above, in which targets were rendered as abstract geometries on green-tinged screens.

The human body disappeared from the frame, replaced by the seductive promise of technological accuracy: the "smart" bomb or the "surgical" strike. American critic Susan Sontag noted how this outcome trained audiences to see military technology rather than military consequences.

THE UNGRIEVABLE

The philosopher Judith Butler has written about "grievability" as the condition that makes some lives recognisable as worth mourning. Not all deaths are grieved equally. Some bodies are rendered, by culture and politics, outside the frame of moral concern.

The visual grammar being used by the White House frames people as game avatars. And game avatars, by definition, are not grievable. They are targets – kills to be celebrated.

On 28 February, more than 160 girls, most under 12, were killed by a US air strike at the Shajareh Tayyebeh elementary school in Minab. They did not appear in the White House's content at all.

When pressed, US President Donald Trump suggested Iran may have struck the school itself using a Tomahawk missile and then said: "I just don't know enough about it. Whatever the report shows, I'm willing to live with that".

Hegseth, meanwhile, has already dissolved the Pentagon's civilian protection mission and fired the military's lawyers responsible for keeping operations within international law, describing them as "roadblocks".

Democratic scrutiny of war depends not just on information but on moral response: the capacity to feel that what is happening matters.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Memes will continue to circulate. Governments will continue to compete for attention in crowded digital spaces.

But the starting point is recognising what is actually at stake. The problem is not simply that viral clips lack context (although they do). It is the visual grammar they deploy that actively forecloses the emotional responses that serious public debate requires.

Wes J Bryant, a former US special operations targeting specialist (who worked on civilian harm prevention), puts it plainly: Audiences, too, can learn to pause. Not just to ask what happened, but what the format in front of them is preventing them from feeling, and about whom. That question, taken seriously, is the beginning of accountability.

War is not experienced as a highlight reel. It is experienced as loss, uncertainty, grief and irreversible destruction. Restoring that understanding is not a media literacy problem. It is a moral one. —*The Conversation*

—AA

US to defend Israel against genocide charge in ICJ

THE HAGUE, 13 MARCH

The US will intervene in the genocide case against Israel brought at the United Nations' highest court by South Africa, arguing that the accusations are false and warning that a ruling against Israel could undermine international law. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is considering whether Israel's military operation in Gaza amounts to genocide under a treaty drawn up after World War II. Israel has vehemently denied the allegations. In a filing on Thursday, the US says that the accusations are part of a "broader campaign" against Israel and the Jewish people. "Civilian casualties, even widespread civilian casualties, are not necessarily probative of genocidal intent," the US argues. At least 70,000 people were killed by Israel across Gaza. —*PTI*

Sri Lanka hands over 45 Iranian sailors' bodies

COLOMBO, 13 MARCH

Sri Lanka on Friday handed over the bodies of 45 sailors killed in an attack on an Iranian warship off the island's coast to Iran's embassy, officials said. Chief Magistrate Sameera Dodangoda issued the order on 11 March to the Director of the National Hospital at Karapitiya after a request from Galle harbour police. Last week, Sri Lanka recovered 84 bodies of Iranian sailors after the US submarine attack sank the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena off Galle, returning from Visakhapatnam, India. The 45 bodies will be repatriated from Mattala airport, with 32 survivors from the US torpedo attack also recovered. The bodies were kept under makeshift refrigeration due to limited morgue capacity. —*PTI*

Cuba to release 51 prisoners in surprise move

HAVANA, 13 MARCH

Cuba's government announced it will release 51 prisoners from their prisons in an unexpected move, citing goodwill and close ties with the Vatican. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not specify who will be released but said "all have served a significant part of their sentence and have maintained good conduct". Since 2010, Cuba has pardoned 9,905 inmates, releasing another 10,000 in the past three years. In January 2025, Cuba released dissident José Daniel Ferrer as part of a plan to free over 500 prisoners after talks with the Vatican; Ferrer now resides in the US. It is unclear if political prisoners are included for released, with Prisoners Defenders estimating 1,214 political prisoners in Cuba. —*PTI*

Cambodia drafts law tackling online scam centres

SIEM REAP, 13 MARCH

Cambodia has drafted its first law targeting online scam centres, aiming to shut them down by April. The country is a key hub for scams, extorting victims globally through bogus investments and fake romances, with tens of billions of dollars lost annually. Thousands, mainly from other Asian nations, are recruited with false job offers and forced to work in near-slavery conditions. Information Minister Neth Pheaktra stated the law is crucial for fighting online scams, money laundering, and showing Cambodia is not a safe haven for criminals. The legislation proposes five to 30 years' imprisonment and hefty fines for scam-related offences, but must be approved by Parliament. Experts remain sceptical about the law's effectiveness in dismantling the industry entirely. —*PTI*

IT'S A WIN FOR PUTIN
US REMOVES SANCTIONS ON RUSSIAN OIL

WASHINGTON, 13 MARCH

The Trump administration has temporarily waved sanctions on Russian oil currently stranded at sea, in an attempt to stabilise the global economy with no signs that the US-Israel war would end soon.

The US had granted a similar waiver from sanctions to India to buy Russian oil as part of efforts to cool down oil prices that have been on the rise since the outbreak of war on 28 February.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent made the announcement on X, saying that President Donald Trump "promotes stability in global energy markets and (is) working to keep prices low".

He said it would be a 30-day waiver adding that it was a narrowly tailored, short-term measure that applies only to oil already in transit.

It "will not provide significant financial benefit to the Russian government, which derives the majority of its energy revenue from taxes assessed at the point of extraction," he claimed. "The temporary increase in oil prices is a short-term and temporary disruption that will be a massive benefit to our nation and economy in the long-term."

Brent crude, the international benchmark, remained above $100 per barrel don Friday.

The US and the European Union had imposed a slew of sanctions on Russia after Moscow invaded Ukraine nearly four years ago. The sanctions aimed at crippling Russia's economy so that President Vladimir Putin would relent in the war. Trump had also imposed secondary tariffs on countries like India for purchasing Russian oil.

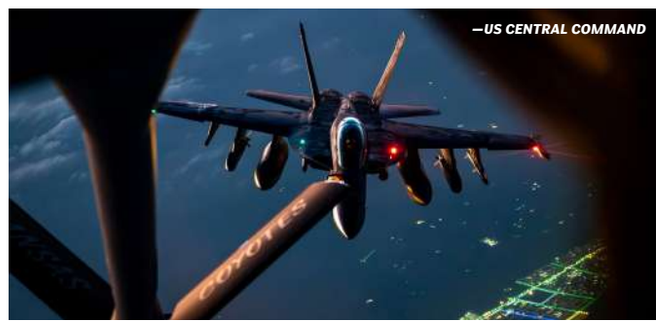
Notably, by Thursday, Russia had earned nearly USD 7 billion in fossil fuel exports during the Iran war. The Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air found Russia's daily revenues have averaged 14 per cent higher than in February.

The US is "effectively acknowledging the obvious: without Russian oil, the global energy market cannot remain stable", Russia's economic envoy Kirill Dmitriev wrote on

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-14

As of Thursday, Russia has earned nearly USD 7 billion in fossil fuel exports during the Iran war —*TASS*

> **Europe, the US, and the entire civilised world, imposed sanctions on Russia for its aggression. If these sanctions are lifted, it means we are recognising the legitimacy of this aggression – that is, one or another state is forgiving Russia for this crime**
>
> —Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukrainian President



—US CENTRAL COMMAND

6 killed as US jet shot down in Iraq

WASHINGTON, 13 MARCH

An American military refuelling plane crashed in Iraq and killed at least six people, US Central Command said on Thursday. The KC-135 aircraft had six crew members onboard.

CENTCOM, which oversees the Middle East, said that two aircraft were involved and that one landed safely and the other went down in western Iraq.

"The circumstances of the incident are under investigation. However, the loss of the aircraft was not due to hostile fire or friendly fire," CENTCOM claimed. However, Iranian-backed Iraqi militias claimed that they shot down the refuelling jet, said state-run Press TV.

The tanker is the fourth reported aircraft to crash amid the US military's operations against Iran. Last week, three American fighter jets were mistakenly downed by friendly Kuwaiti fire, although no casualties were reported. The US military on Friday said all six airmen aboard a refuelling aircraft that went down in Iraq are dead.

FRENCH SOLDIER KILLED IN IRAQ

A French soldier was killed in an attack targeting Irbil in Iraq's northern Kurdish region, French President Emmanuel Macron said on Friday. France earlier said six soldiers were hurt in a drone strike in Irbil, where French troops are deployed as part of a multinational counterterrorism mission supporting Iraqi forces fight against Islamic State militants.

Meanwhile, NATO Defences on Friday intercepted a ballistic missile fired from Iran over Turkey, the Defence Ministry said, making it the third such incursion. Blast were heard near the Incirlik airbase, where US troops are stationed. —*Agencies*

Don threatens Iran's 'deranged scumbags'

WASHINGTON, 13 MARCH

US President Donald Trump on Friday signalled the US intention of going all out in its campaign against Iran, claiming the US was winning the war.

"We are totally destroying the terrorist regime of Iran, militarily, economically, and otherwise, yet, if you read the Failing New York Times, you would incorrectly think that we are not winning. Iran's Navy is gone, their Air Force is no longer, missiles, drones and everything else are being decimated, and their leaders have been wiped from the face of the earth," he posted on Truth Social. "Watch what happens to these deranged scumbags today."

Meanwhile, Iran's Military Headquarters the Khatam al-Anbiya threatened to attack US-backed oil and gas infrastructure in the region if Tehran's energy or port infrastructure was targeted. —*ANI*

Panama Canal may gain in West Asia war

Panama Canal Administrator Ricaurte Vasquez said that the war in West Asia and rising fuel costs could ultimately benefit the interoceanic waterway as global shippers adjust routes. "When costs increase, when marine fuel price rises, the Canal becomes a more attractive route," Vasquez said.

China to send $200K to Iran school victims

Red Cross Society of China on Friday said it will provide USD 2,00,000 in emergency humanitarian assistance to the Iranian Red Crescent Society for students killed in an airstrike on an elementary school in Iran during the joint US-Israel attacks across the country.

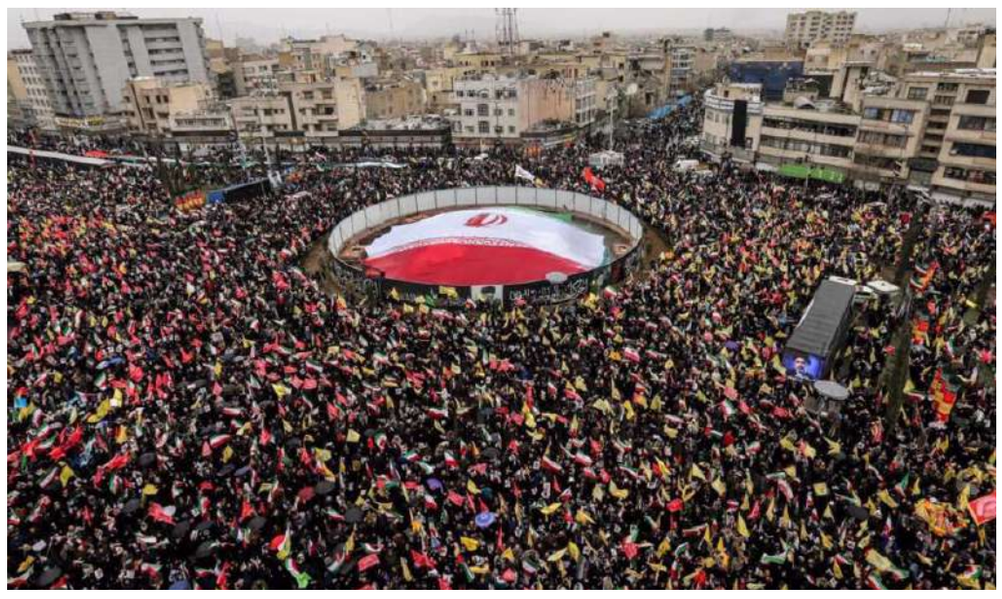
Closing Hormuz could starve Gulf countries

The 38 km wide Strait of Hormuz is critical for more than just oil exports from the Gulf countries. Nearly 90% of their food imports come through the Strait, meaning that a prolonged closure could have profound impact. Furthermore, the countries lack freshwater sources and are dependent on desalinated plants – which turn sea water into drinkable water.

Country	Food Import Dependency	Desalinated Water Dependency
UAE	85% – 90%	90%
Kuwait	80% – 90%	90%
Saudi Arabia	80% – 85%	70% (90% for Riyadh)
Oman	80% – 90%	86%
Qatar	85% – 90%	High
Bahrain	85% – 90%	High

SOURCE: FPRI

Blasts rock Iran; Gulf, Lebanon bleed



As thousands gathered in Tehran for al-Quds day, US-Israel launched massive airstrikes —*PRESSTV/X*

DUBAI, 13 MARCH

The US and Israel continued to launch strikes across Iran including targeting a government organised protest march, as Tehran retaliated by sending drones and missiles across the Gulf.

Explosion rocked the Ferdowsi Square area in Tehran midday, where thousands had gathered for an annual Quds Day rally to support the Palestinians and call for Israel's demise in which they chanted "death to Israel" and "death to America."

Israel had issued a warning on a Farsi-language X account for people to clear the area shortly before the blast. But few Iranians would have seen it, as authorities have almost completely shut down the internet since the start of the war.

Footage from the scene showed people chanting "God is greatest," as smoke rose in the area.

Earlier Israel announced another wave of strikes in Iran targeting infrastructure, and said its air force had hit over 200 targets within 24 hours, including missile

launchers, defence systems and weapons production sites.

In Washington, Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said that over 15,000 enemy targets have been struck, which is more than 1,000 a day since the war began on 28 February.

STRIKES CONTINUE ACROSS GULF

Saudi Arabia said that it had downed nearly 50 Iranian drones sent in multiple waves. Buildings were hit it Dubai as well. Iran said earlier this week that it would target banks after an airstrike hit a bank in Tehran. Iran had earlier this week hit at least three Amazon Web Services data centres, triggering fears that the strikes will reshape the economies in the Gulf.

ISRAEL BOMBS LEBANON

Nearly 60 people were wounded in northern Israel after the Lebanon's Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah said that it had fired several rocket salvos toward the area and at Israeli troops in southern Lebanon. Almost all the injuries were described as very minor.

At least 24 people were killed across Lebanon by Israeli strikes.

At least 687 people have been killed in Israeli attacks on Lebanon in just less than two weeks, including 98 children. More than 8,00,000 people, or around 10 per cent of the country's population have also been forcibly displaced by Israeli attacks.

Iranian officials say that over 1,300 people have been killed there, Israel reported 12 deaths. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said the strikes so far were "just the beginning". —*Agencies*

> **They've been killing innocent people all over the world for 47 years, and now I, as the 47th President of the United States of America, am killing them. What a great honour it is to do so**
>
> —Donald Trump, US President

> **I wouldn't issue life insurance policies on any of the leaders of the terrorist organisations**
>
> —Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister

2 migrants killed in Oman

Two migrant workers were killed after debris from a downed drone fell in an industrial area in the Sohar province of Oman, state media said. Several others were injured in the strikes.

Dubai high rises struck

Blasts were heard in Dubai and videos circulating on social media showed damages to several high-rise buildings. The Dubai Media Office said that debris from the interception caused a "minor incident" on the outside a building in central Dubai.

KASH PATEL'S FRIENDS?

Indian-origin brothers face 400 yrs in US jail

WASHINGTON, 13 MARCH

Two Indian-origin brothers from Pennsylvania have been convicted in the US for running a multi-state racketeering conspiracy through the Savani Group, which prosecutors described as a "complex criminal enterprise." The brothers face statutory sentences of 400 years in prison, according to authorities.

Pennsylvania dentist Bhaskar Savani, 60, and his brother Arun Savani, 58, were convicted of orchestrating a complex criminal enterprise through their Savani Group. The case drew attention as the two brothers were earlier photographed with FBI Director Kash Patel. They had also lauded Patel on social media, although they were already on the agency's radar, which led to them being charged in 2023.

Arun Savani and his brother Bhaskar Savani are convicted for Medicaid and H-1B visa fraud case — *FACEBOOK/ARUN SAVANI AND LINKEDIN/BHASKAR SAVANI*

Their schemes included Medicaid fraud, money laundering, tax evasion, and a massive H-1B visa fraud plot that forced Indian workers to pay back portions of their wages to the brother's group.

Authorities said the group committed large-scale healthcare fraud by illegitimately securing Medicaid contracts. Officials said the scheme defrauded Medicaid of over $30 million.

Prosecutors also cited tax and wire fraud involving $2.7 million in concealed income through various false business expenses.

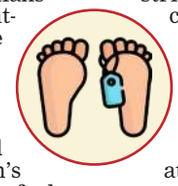
They were also accused of laundering money through corporate bank accounts tied to their businesses.

Bhaskar was also charged for a fraud scheme involving prototype dental implants lablelled "Not For Human Use" . but were implanted in patients without knowledge or consent, despite the implants not being cleared by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). —*Agencies*

PAK AIRSTRIKES KILLED 6 CIVILIANS, ALLEGES AFGHANISTAN

KABUL, 13 MARCH

Afghanistan's Taliban government early Friday accused Pakistan's military of targeting homes in overnight airstrikes in Kabul and the southern province of Kandahar, saying at least six civilians were killed, as fighting between the neighbours entered its third week.



Government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said that Pakistan's aircraft also struck fuel depots belonging to the private airline Kam Air near Kandahar airport. "This company supplies fuel to civilian airlines as well as to UN aircraft," he said.

Pakistan's military and government did not immediately comment.

Both sides have claimed to inflict heavy losses in what has become their deadliest fighting in years, a confrontation Islamabad has described as an "open war" with Afghanistan.

In his posts on X, Mujahid claimed that Pakistani strikes hit multiple civilian sites and uninhabited locations in Afghanistan's Paktia and Paktika, as well as other areas. He said the attacks "will not go unanswered."

Meanwhile, Afghanistan conducted retaliatory strategic drone strikes on military centres used by the Pakistan army in Kohath in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Afghanistan's Ministry of Defence claimed on Friday. —*PTI*

— ANI

Fitch raises India's GDP growth forecast to 7.5%

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Fitch Ratings on Friday raised India's GDP growth forecast marginally to 7.5 per cent for current fiscal with domestic demand being the biggest growth driver this year.

In December, Fitch had projected India's GDP growth at 7.4 per cent for current fiscal.

For FY26-27, Fitch has revised its growth estimate upwards to 6.7 per cent, from 6.4 per cent projected in December 2025.

In its Global Economic Outlook- March 2026, Fitch projected world GDP growth at 2.6 per cent in 2026 on the assumption that the Iran war does not result in a larger or an enduring spike in energy prices that pushes the annual 2026 oil price forecast above $70/barrel.

About India, Fitch said there are tentative signs that real activity is slowing in January and February, but the economy remains resilient, and credit growth is still in double digits.

Fitch expects growth to slow in first half of FY 2026-27. —*PTI*

Passenger vehicle dispatches rise 10.6% in Feb: SIAM

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Domestic passenger vehicle dispatches rose 10.6 per cent year-on-year to 417,705 units in February from 3,77,689 units the year prior, caused by positive market sentiment. However, industry body SIAM warned on Friday that the conflict in West Asia remains a concern, as it could disrupt both manufacturing and exports. Commenting on the performance, SIAM Director General Rajesh Menon said, "Positive sentiments continue for passenger vehicles, two-wheelers, and three-wheelers posted their highest ever Sales of February in 2026 compared to February 2025." The West Asia conflict could disrupt supply chains. —*PTI*

Coal India's arm to float IPO on 20 March

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Coal Central Mine Planning and Design Institute (CMPDIL), an arm of state-owned Coal India, will launch its initial public offering (IPO) on 20 March. The company's maiden public offering ends on 24 March, while bidding for anchor investors will take place on 18 March. The issue will be entirely an offer for sale of 10.71 crore shares, with no fresh issue component. CMPDIL renders its consultancy services in the areas of coal exploration, mine planning & design, coal beneficiation and utilisation, allied engineering services, environmental engineering, information and communication technology, laboratory services, and field services. .—*PTI*

Markets tumble for 3rd day amid West Asia crisis

Sensex tumbled 1,579.82 points, Nifty tanked 488.05 points

MUMBAI, 13 MARCH

Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty wilted under selling pressure for the third straight day on Friday as rising crude prices raised concerns over inflationary pressures and global economic stability.

Intense selling in global markets, unabated foreign fund outflows and continuing weakness in the rupee also dented investor sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 1,579.82 points, or 2 per cent, to 74,454.60 during intra-day trade. The benchmark finally settled at 74,563.92, down 1,470.50 points, or 1.93 per cent.

A total of 3,348 stocks declined, while 941 advanced and 132 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty tanked 488.05 points, or 2.06 per cent, to end at 23,151.10.

The sharp correction has largely been driven by the surge in crude oil prices and rising macroeconomic concerns for energy-importing economies like India, Hariprasad K, Research Analyst and Founder, Livelong Wealth, said.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms slumped by Rs 10,24,181.74 crore to Rs 4,29,82,252.27 crore (USD 4.65 trillion) on Friday.

A total of 3,348 stocks declined, while 941 advanced and 132 remained unchanged on the BSE Sensex —*PIXABAY*

The BSE benchmark tanked 4,354.98 points or 5.51 per cent, and the Nifty dropped 1,299.35 points or 5.31 per cent.

Since February 27, the 30-share BSE Sensex has nosedived 6,723.27 points, or 8.27 per cent. During this time, the market valuation of BSE-listed companies eroded by Rs 33,68,419 crore to Rs 4,29,82,252.27 crore (USD 4.65 trillion).

From the Sensex constituents, Larsen & Toubro plunged the most by 7.52 per cent, followed by Tata Steel, SBI, Bharat Electronics, Maruti, and UltraTech Cement.

In contrast, Hindustan Unilever and Bharti Airtel were the gainers.

The BSE midcap select index tanked 2.87 per cent, and the smallcap select index dropped 2.48 per cent.

WORLD MARKETS

DOW (US): 49,698 **(1.56%)**

S&P 500 (US): 6,744.75 **(0.83%)**

Nasdaq (US): 22,414.41 **(0.43%)**

Nikkei (Japan): 53,819.61 **(1.16%)**

Hang Seng (China): 25,465.61 **(0.98%)**

DAX (Germany): 23,728.49 **(0.59%)**

FTSE 100 (UK): 10,360.30 **(0.57%)**

CAC 40 (Paris): 7,973.20 **(0.12%)**

KOSPI (South Korea): 5,487.24 **(1.75%)**

Metal dropped the most by 4.83 per cent, followed by industrials (4.15 per cent), commodities (4.01 per cent), PSU bank (3.73 per cent), auto (3.27 per cent) and MidSmall Private Banks Quality (3.13 per cent). —*PTI*

A stronger US dollar, heavy foreign fund outflowsand sustained selling in the domestic equity markets weighed on the rupee —*REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE*

Rupee slumps to record low of 92.45

MUMBAI, 13 MARCH

The rupee slumped 20 paise to close at a fresh record low of 92.45 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday as crude oil prices crossed USD 101/barrel amid the raging West Asia conflict.

A stronger greenback, heavy foreign fund outflows and sustained selling in the domestic equity markets further weighed on the rupee, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 92.33 and kept losing ground to hit a fresh intra-day low of 92.47 against the US dollar. It eventually settled at its lifetime low of 92.45 (provisional), down 20 paise from its previous close.

In the preceding session, the rupee lost 24 paise to settle at 92.25 against the US dollar.

"Rising crude oil prices and continued FII outflows also pressured the rupee," Anuj Choudhary, research analyst, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

Rupee is expected to trade in the range of Rs 92.10-92.80, Choudhary added.

The dollar index was trading 0.43 per cent higher at 100.17.

On the domestic equity market front, the 30-share BSE Sensex crashed 1,470.50 points, or 1.93 per cent, to 74,563.92, while the Nifty plummeted to 23,151.10, down 488.05 points, or 2.06 per cent.

Foreign institutional investors sold equities worth Rs 7,049.87 crore on a net basis on 12 March, according to exchange data.

Meanwhile, retail inflation moved up to 3.21 per cent in February. —*PTI*

Analysts said the gold came under pressure as US dollar strengthened, making it less attractive for holders of other currencies—*PTI*

Gold futures decline to Rs 1.59L/10g on strong $

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Gold price declined by Rs 992 to Rs 1.59 lakh per 10 grams in the futures trade on Friday, tracking a bearish sentiment in the international markets and a stronger US dollar.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange, the yellow metal for April delivery depreciated by Rs 992, or 0.62 per cent, to Rs 1,59,279 per 10 grams in a business turnover of 7,891 lots.

Analysts said gold came under pressure as the US dollar strengthened, making the precious metal less attractive for holders of other currencies.

Renisha Chainani, head of research at Augmont, said the gold is consolidating currently, with prices expected to move towards the USD 5,250 per ounce in the near term, which translates to around Rs 1.63 lakh per 10 grams in the domestic market. A rise towards USD 5,300 per ounce, or around Rs 1.65 lakh per 10 grams, cannot be ruled out if geopolitical tensions persist and safe-haven demand strengthens.

The dollar index was trading 0.5 per cent higher at 100.23, weighing on bullion prices in the overseas markets.

Chainani said the stronger US dollar has limited the upside in precious metals, while persistent inflation concerns have reduced expectations of a near-term Federal Reserve rate cut.

Globally, Comex gold futures for the April contract fell USD 31.69, or nearly 1 per cent, to USD 5,094.11 per ounce. —*PTI*

Darjeeling tea industry flags LPG crisis

KOLKATA, 13 MARCH

The Darjeeling Tea Association has warned that the production of Darjeeling tea could decline further due to the non-availability of industrial LPG, risking supply disruptions to factories in West Bengal.

In a letter to the deputy chairman of the Tea Board, the association cited a Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas directive urging public sector oil marketing companies to prioritise LPG supply for households.

The association expressed concern that this order might result in a shortage of industrial LPG for tea estates, directly affecting the livelihoods of 55,000 workers and their families.

They requested assistance to ensure uninterrupted LPG supply to Darjeeling's tea factories. Over the past decade, the estates have largely shifted from coal to LPG for production.

The industry faces a crisis with output falling from 14 million kg in 1990 to under 6 million kg in recent years, with 2024 and 2025 recording historic lows. January-November 2025 data showed an 8.79 per cent decline.

Industry analysts point to cheap Nepali tea and ageing plantations as contributing factors, and any disruption during the crucial first flush season could further damage the struggling industry. —*PTI*

The Darjeeling Tea Association said that industrial LPG shortage may affect tea production, affecting livelihoods of 55,000 workers —*PTI*

LOK SABHA APPROVES RS 2.01L CR ADDITIONAL SPENDING

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

The Lok Sabha on Friday passed the second batch of supplementary demands for grants, allowing the government to spend an additional Rs 2.01 lakh crore in the current fiscal.

Through the second batch of supplementary demands, the government sought Lok Sabha approval for spending a gross of Rs 2.81 lakh crore extra in the current fiscal year. With additional receipts of Rs 80,000 crore estimated in the supplementary, the net additional cash spending will be Rs 2.01 lakh crore.

Despite the additional expenditure, the fiscal deficit for 2025-26 will be within the revised estimates (RE), Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

The second batch of supplementary demands was passed by a voice vote in the Lok Sabha.

In RE 2025-26, the fiscal deficit has been estimated at par with the Budget estimates of 2025-26 at 4.4 per cent of GDP.

The government had cut total expenditure to Rs 49.65 lakh crore, from Rs 50.65 lakh crore in the BE.

Till January, the government had spent Rs 36.90 lakh crore, as per data by Controller General of Accounts. —*PTI*

Stabilisation Fund to help tackle global challenges: Sitharaman

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced on Friday that the Rs 1 lakh crore Economic Stabilisation Fund will provide fiscal headroom for India to respond to global challenges.

During the debate on the second batch of supplementary demands for grants in the Lok Sabha, she explained that the fund will serve as a buffer to absorb shocks from unforeseen global issues like the ongoing situation in West Asia.

She reiterated, "The Rs 1 lakh crore Economic Stabilisation Fund will give fiscal headroom to allow India to respond to global headwinds."

The government seeks approval for an extra gross expenditure of Rs 2.81 lakh crore in the current fiscal year through this supplementary.

After accounting for Rs 80,000 crore in additional receipts, the net cash spending will be Rs 2.01 lakh crore.

Sitharaman confirmed that the fiscal deficit for 2025-26 will stay within the revised estimates (RE), which projects it at 4.4 per cent of GDP. She added, "There is no increase in expenditure beyond the BE of 2025-26 due to the second supplementary." —*PTI*

Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks in the Lok Sabha during the second part of Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Friday —*PTI*

Japan's KTD invests in Indian energy market

NEW DELHI/TOKYO, 13 MARCH

Japanese utility firm Kansai Transmission and Distribution (KTD), part of USD 27 billion Kansai Electric Power, has entered the Indian energy sector, acquiring a 10 per cent stake in OMC Power, which is developing a 1 GW renewable energy portfolio in India.

KTD becomes the fourth Japanese company to invest in OMC Power, after Mitsui & Co, Chubu Electric Power, and Honda Motor Co Ltd.

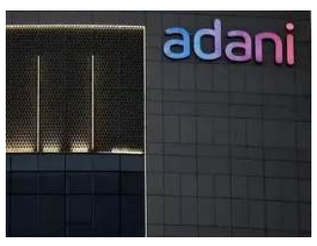
Co-founder & CEO Rohit Chandra stated that the companies had discussed for over a year to establish a collaboration, based on research and feasibility studies. He added, "It is also the first investment by Kansai Transmission and Distribution in India's energy sector. They chose us for their India journey."

KTD's investment of Rs 160 crore has increased Japanese ownership in OMC Power to approximately 67 per cent. The funds will accelerate the 1 GW portfolio and enable the development of smart grid infrastructure, including digital monitoring and resilience.

The partnership offers mutual benefits, with Kansai Electric Power contributing its expertise, and KTD aiming to support sustainable energy solutions. —*PTI*

Global investors unwilling to let go of Adani bonds

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH



Even as tensions stemming from the West Asia crisis unsettle global markets, investors have shown little willingness to part with Adani Group's dollar bonds, despite a buyback by its ports arm, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ).

On 12 March, APSEZ completed a cash tender offer to repurchase parts of two series of US dollar-denominated senior notes, trimming its outstanding debt by about $199.5 million, people with direct knowledge of the matter said.

The offer covered up to $345.1 million of 4 per cent notes due in 2027 and $150 million of 3.10 per cent notes due in 2031, suggesting a potential buyback of roughly $495 million.

Yet bondholders offered back far less than that. APSEZ eventually accepted $102.1 million of the 2027 notes and $97.5 million of the 2031 notes, they said.

In effect, more than 60 per cent of investors chose to keep their bonds, declining the opportunity to exit through the tender offer.

According to familiar sources, some US-based institutional investors have also continued to add to their holdings in Adani-linked bonds in the secondary market. —*PTI*

WILL BE CHAIR OF BOARD

Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayan steps down after 18 years

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

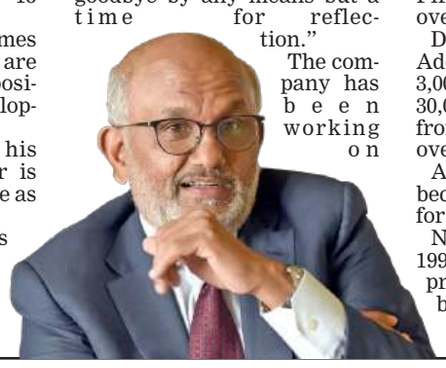
Adobe has announced that its chief executive officer, Shantanu Narayen, will step down from his position after serving the company for 18 years.

Narayen's departure comes at a time when investors are concerned over Adobe's position amid the rapid developments in AI.

Narayen will stay in his position until a successor is identified and will continue as chair of the board.

Adobe is facing questions about its long-term strategy in artificial intelligence. AI image generation tools such as Google's Nano Banana have made it easier for users to edit images without having to need apps such as Adobe's Photoshop.

Narayen said, "This is not a goodbye by any means but a time for reflection."



The company has been working on its own AI products such as Firefly. According to Adobe, it has seen a rapid adoption of its AI-first products from users, with annual recurring revenue from offerings like Firefly more than tripling over the previous year.

During Narayen's tenure, Adobe expanded from roughly 3,000 employees to more than 30,000 and saw revenue rise from less than USD 1 billion to over USD 25 billion.

Adobe's creative suite became the go-to suite of apps for creators.

Narayen joined Adobe in 1998 and was promoted to president and COO in 2005, before taking over as the CEO in 2007. —*Agencies*

Kids, mentally ill users must avoid ChatGPT, warns Musk

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Elon Musk has warned that children and people with mental health conditions should stay away from ChatGPT, intensifying a public dispute over artificial intelligence safety with Sam Altman.

The Tesla and SpaceX chief made the remarks on X (Twitter), responding to a discussion about the fatal shooting in the Canadian town of Tumbler Ridge.

The comments added fuel to an escalating debate over the safety and oversight of rapidly advancing AI tools.

A suspect in the Tumbler Ridge shooting had reportedly interacted multiple times with ChatGPT in the days leading up to the attack.

The Wall Street Journal reported that some of the conversations reportedly included discussions involving violent scenarios and were flagged by OpenAI's automated monitoring systems.

The employees internally debated over sharing the chats with the police, they did not.

The mother of a student injured in the shooting has filed a lawsuit against OpenAI.

Musk, who co-founded OpenAI before leaving the organisation in 2018, has blamed ChatGPT for several deaths. Altman raised safety concerns about Musk's own ventures. —*Agencies*

-PTI

Kemp FC eyes strong start in IWL 2

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Kemp Football Club will begin its Indian Women's League 2 campaign against Suruchi Sangha FC of Kolkata on 25 March as the Bengaluru-based side aims for promotion to the top tier. Formed only four years ago, Kemp FC has quickly emerged as one of the most promising teams in Karnataka's women's football circuit. Ahead of the season, the club also announced support from VST Group. With an impressive win rate of around 80 per cent and a structured development pathway for more than 120 young players, the club has progressed through the KSFA league system and now enters IWL 2 among the favourites to move up. Our focus remains firmly on football and on building a pathway for young women to compete at the highest level.—*PTI*

Al Sadd manager Mancini is unable to return to Qatar

QATAR, 13 MARCH

Al Sadd coach Roberto Mancini will not be present for Friday's Qatar Stars League match against Umm Salal as he has been unable to return to Doha due to the conflict in West Asia , which has disrupted air travel, the club said on Thursday.The Italian left the Gulf country to attend to "a family medical matter," the club said in a statement."-Following the recent developments in the region, Mancini departed as scheduled. However, due to the flight situation, he has not yet been able to return."The United States and Israel have launched strikes on Iran since 28 February, triggering a region-wide conflict as Tehran attacked Israel and Gulf countries.—*PTI*

UTT season 7 to be held in Goa in July

GOA, 13 MARCH

The seventh season of Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT) is set to be held at the Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium in Taleigao, Goa, from July, organisers announced on Friday. After being staged in Mumbai, Pune, New Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, and most recently in Ahmedabad, it will be the first time UTT will be played in the coastal state Speaking about the upcoming season, UTT co-promoter Vita Dani said, "Ultimate Table Tennis has steadily become a key pillar in India's table tennis ecosystem. Over the years, we've seen the standard of the sport rise across every level, from grassroots programmes to international competition."—*PTI*

-PTI

Duplantis breaks pole vault world record for 15th

LONDON, 13 MARCH

Armand Duplantis broke the pole vault world record on Thursday night for the 15th time at the meet that bears his name in Uppsala, Sweden, clearing 6.31 meters on his first attempt. The 26-year-old Swede broke the record he has owned since clearing 6.17m in 2020. Duplantis only took four vaults at the indoor event in his adopted hometown. After clearing 5.65m, 5.90m, and then 6.08m, all on his first attempts, he asked for the bar to be lifted 23cm to a world-record height. He immediately soared over to end his evening's work. It was the second time Duplantis has broken the world record in Sweden.—*PTI*

It's not IPL: Shukla on Sunrisers Leeds' signing of Abrar

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

The BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla on Friday downplayed the acquisition of Pakistan spinner Abrar Ahmed by Sunrisers Leeds during The Hundred auction, saying the development in an "overseas league" is beyond the board's ambit.

The Sunrisers Leeds, owned by Chennai-based media conglomerate Sun Group, on Thursday signed Pakistan mystery spinner Abrar during The Hundred player auction, making him the first Pakistan cricketer to be picked by an Indian-owned franchise in the tournament. "It doesn't concern us. It's not the IPL. What happens in The Hundred or other overseas leagues, we have nothing to do with it," Shukla told PTI.

The franchise paid GBP 190,000 (approximately Rs 2.34 crore) for Abrar after a bidding contest with Trent Rockets. The tournament will be held from July 21 to August 16. Sunrisers Leeds faced backlash following Abrar's signing, with the team's X account suspended briefly. IPL franchises have not signed any Pakistani player since 2009 due to strained diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The Sun Group, which also owns Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL, completed a full takeover of the erstwhile Northern Superchargers last year, acquiring a 49 per cent stake from the ECB and the remaining 51 per cent from county club Yorkshire for around GBP 100 million.

Sunrisers CEO Kavya Maran attended Thursday's auction and raised the paddle during the bidding.

The group also owns Sunrisers Eastern Cape in SA20 but does not have a Pakistan player in its squad. Abrar was the second Pakistan cricketer sold in the auction after mystery spinner Usman Tariq, who was picked by Birmingham Phoenix for GBP 140,000 (approximately Rs 1.72 crore). However, Phoenix have no IPL connection. —*PTI*

India edges out Italy 1-0 to set up final against England

Manisha Chauhan scored winning goal for India

HYDERABAD, 13 MARCH

-PTI

The Indian Women's Hockey team earned their spot in the Final of the FIH Hockey World Cup Qualifiers 2026 Hyderabad, Telangana campaign as they beat Italy 1-0 in their Semi-Final contest at the G. M. C. Balayogi Hockey Ground (Gachibowli Hockey Complex) on Friday.

Manisha Chauhan (40') scored the winning goal for India, and they will now face England in the Final. It was an extremely tight contest in the first quarter as both sides constantly battled for possession in the midfield. India started the match strongly with a couple of strong circle entries; however, Italy eventually started attacking aggressively and created a few good chances on goal. India won the momentum back in the second quarter. The hosts used their flanks to push the ball ahead and started attacking in numbers, making crucial circle entries. In the 18th minute, India won the first penalty corner of the evening, but Navneet Kaur's shot on goal was stopped well by Italian goalkeeper Lucia Ines Caruso. In the 27th minute, they were awarded another penalty corner as India played out an interesting variation.

The ball was played back to the injector, Captain Salima Tete, but her shot was stopped on the line by Italy's last defender, denying them a goal. In the early minutes of the second half, Italy launched a strong attack on goal as Emilia Munitis was through on goal, but India's goalkeeper Bichu Devi Kharibam came out and made a crucial save. In the 40th minute, India were awarded yet another penalty corner, and this time they successfully converted it to break the deadlock.

India will next face England in the Final on 14th March at 7:30 PM IST. —*PTI*

IPL 2026

KKR sign Blessing Muzarabani

MUMBAI, 13 MARCH

Zimbabwe pacer Blessing Muzarabani has been signed by Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) for the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) season, the franchise announced on Friday.

Muzarabani is a likely replacement for Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman, who was released from the KKR squad on the BCCI's instructions following political tensions between India and Bangladesh.

"The 6 ft 8" right-arm quick has emerged as one of Zimbabwe's leading pace bowlers in the shortest format, known for his steep bounce and ability to strike in key phases of the innings. Muzarabani brings significant T20 experience, having claimed over 90 wickets in more than 80 T20 Internationals at an average of around 21, with best figures of 3/8," KKR said in a statement.

"His pace and consistency across global leagues and international cricket add further depth to KKR's pace attack heading into the season," the franchise added.

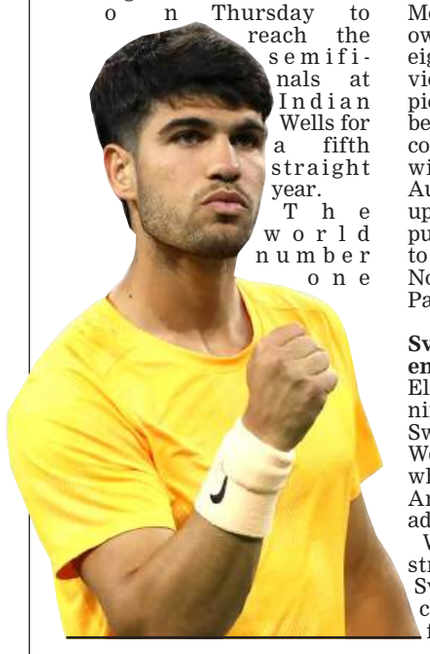
Muzarabani was Zimbabwe's leading wicket-taker during the recently concluded T20 World Cup 2026, where he picked up 13 wickets in six matches.

The 29-year-old had joined Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) last year as a replacement for the injured Lungi Ngidi. However, he didn't get a game during RCB's run to the title. Muzarabani is scheduled to arrive in Kolkata on 17 March. —*PTI*

Blessing Muzarabani -PTI

Alcaraz beats Norrie to set up semifinal clash against Medvedev

INDIAN WELLS,13 MARCH



Carlos Alcaraz extended his unbeaten season and got revenge over Cameron Norrie on Thursday to reach the semifinals at Indian Wells for a fifth straight year. The world number one from Spain emerged from a see-saw battle with 29th-ranked Norrie with a 6-3, 6-4 victory.

He will meet Russian Daniil Medvedev, who pushed his own ATP winning streak to eight matches with a 6-1, 7-5 victory over defending champion Jack Draper. Alcaraz, 22, became the youngest player to complete a career Grand Slam with his victory in the Australian Open and followed up with a title in Qatar. He pushed his 2026 season record to 16-0 with the win over Norrie, who beat him in the Paris Masters in November.

Svitolina upsets Swiatek to enter semis

Elina Svitolina secured a stunning 6-2, 4-6, 6-4 win over Iga Swiatek to reach the Indian Wells semifinals on Thursday, while world number one Aryna Sabalenka also advanced earlier in the day.

World number two Swiatek struggled early against Svitolina, with the Ukrainian capitalising on five double faults to secure three breaks and take the opening set in 38 minutes. Swiatek found her rhythm in the second to force a decider, but Svitolina regained the upper hand by securing the only break in a closely fought third set before confidently serving out the match. "I'm extremely happy, it was a tough match," said Svitolina, who is back in the semis for the first time in seven years. "Iga always brings a bit extra out of me with that fighting spirit. I had to really push myself to close that match," she

NO ONE CAN EXCLUDE

FIFA WC: Iran soccer team pushes back on Trump comments

GENEVA, 13 MARCH

Pushing back on U.S. President Donald Trump's comments, Iran's national soccer team says "no one can exclude" it from playing in the men's World Cup in the United States.Instead, a post on the team's official Instagram account on Thursday suggested maybe the U.S. team should be excluded after Trump indicated that the host country couldn't guarantee the safety of the Iranian players.

Trump wrote in a social media post Thursday that the Iranian team was welcome at the World Cup despite the ongoing war with Iran, but that "I really don't believe it is appropriate that they be there, for their own life and safety."Iran is set to play all three of its World Cup group games in the U.S., which is co-hosting the tournament with Mexico and Canada. —*PTI*

SATWIK-CHIRAG CONCEDE A WALKOVER IN QF

LONDON, 13 MARCH

India's men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty crashed out of the Swiss Open 2026 quarterfinals on Friday after giving a walkover win to Christian Kjaer and Rasmus Kjaer of Denmark. The reason for the Indian pair not taking the court was not known.The top-seeded Indians had endured a 74-minute round of 16 match on Thursday, where they defeated Okamura and Yamashita of Japan. Earlier in the first round, Satwik and Chirag had overcome the Indonesian pair of Koh and Kubo. —*PTI*

Former AIFF general secretary Kushal Das is dead

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Veteran administrator and former All India Football Federation (AIFF) general secretary Kushal Das, who played a significant role in organising the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup in India, died here on Friday.

Das was 65. He held the position of AIFF general secretary for 12 years before resigning in 2022 on health grounds.

Before entering football administration in 2010, Das had served as Chief Financial Officer of the International Cricket Council (ICC) and International Management Group (IMG) India.

He breathed his last at a private hospital in the capital, according to Shaji Prabhakaran, another long-time football administrator who succeeded Das as the AIFF's full-time secretary general in 2022 after former I-League CEO Sunando Dhar served as the acting GS for a brief while.

"Former AIFF General Secretary Kushal Das passed away this morning at a private hospital in Delhi. Sending my deepest sympathies and prayers to his family and loved ones during this incredibly difficult time. Om Shanti," Prabhakaran wrote on his 'X' handle.

During his tenure, the Indian national team qualified for three AFC Asian Cup tournaments besides the country hosting the prestigious FIFA U-17 World Cup for the first time in 2017, which he described as "a game-changer" for Indian football. —*PTI*

Midtjylland make Forest pay for wasteful finishing

LONDON, 13 MARCH

Nottingham Forest's profligacy was punished late on by FC Midtjylland as they fell to a 1-0 first-leg defeat in the Europa League round of 16 in treacherous conditions at the City Ground.

Substitute Guesung Cho capitalised on a lapse in concentration from Forest defender Ola Aina to head in the winner for Midtjylland with 10 minutes to go on a rain-soaked night by the River Trent. The home side, now winless in five, had 22 shots yet failed to score. Midtjylland make Forest pay for wasteful finishing.

Ticket prices were slashed for Forest fans in the hope of filling out the stadium, but those in attendance endured another frustrating night watching their team flounder in front of goal in the wet and windy weather. The night, predictably, ended with boos.

Sacking Sean Dyche to bring in Vitor Pereira has not had the desired effect so far. Since the Forest boss took over, overseeing four defeats in six, no side in Europe's top five leagues has lost more games in all competitions. Star man Elliot Anderson, who scored in last week's draw at Manchester City, tried to overcome the conditions. —*PTI*

-MIDTJYLLAND

Diksha makes cut in Australian Women's Open

ADELAIDE, 13 MARCH

Diksha Dagar, Vani Kapoor, and Avani Prashanth made the halfway cut at the Women's Australian Open, while two other Indians, Hitaashee Bakshi and Pranavi Urs, missed the cut here on Friday.

Diksha, who was the top Indian last week, also shot 2-over 74 and was now 2-over for two rounds.

Vani added 2-over 74 to her first round 72. She was also 2-over for 36 holes, and the duo was tied 31st.

Avani, who missed the cut in her last two starts, shot 77 on the first day and added 72 to make the cut on the line at 5-over. —*PTI*

F1'S CHINA SPRINT

Russell and Mercedes dominate again in qualifiers

SHANGHAI, 13 MARCH

George Russell took pole for the sprint race at the Chinese Grand Prix to continue Mercedes' dominant start to the new era of Formula 1 on Friday.

Russell is the driver to beat in Shanghai after his dominant win in Australia last week. With teammate Kimi Antonelli qualifying second and no other team close, Mercedes is on target for another 1-2 finish in Saturday's sprint, which is followed by qualifying for Sunday's Grand Prix.

Lando Norris was 0.621 of a second adrift, a vast gap in F1 terms, in third for McLaren. Only Lewis Hamilton of Ferrari in fourth and Norris' teammate Oscar Piastri in fifth got within a second of Russell's time.

Verstappen, the most prominent critic of the new cars, had another tough qualifying session in eighth, though not as bad as the crash that left him at the back of the grid in Australia last week.

Russell and Mercedes led the way in Friday's sole practice session, as Ferrari failed to find a significant advantage from its unique rear wing, which rotates upside-down for more speed on the straights. Ferrari's Charles Leclerc had the fifth quickest time (1:33.599), followed by Lewis Hamilton (1:34.129).

Hamilton touched tyres with Norris in practice and also spun as he lost control on another lap.

Dubbed the "flip-flop" or "Macarena," it was used briefly in testing, dropped for Australia, and is the sort of innovation that could help Leclerc and Hamilton take the fight to Mercedes. —*PTI*